University of Alberta

Informing Youth of Their Non-Selection in Competitive Sport

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research was to gain understanding about the methods used by coaches to inform youth of their non-selection within youth sport. In this study I investigated the role of these communication methods in regard to the meanings and experiences of those involved. I had a specific interest in looking at subsequent sport participation decisions, and if the way in which youth were released from competitive sport programs affected later sport choices. By interviewing 15 participants: 5 coaches, 5 former youth athletes, and 5 sport parents, an inventory of possible means to communicate tryout results was gathered, and research themes and meanings were interpreted about the communication of non-selection. As indicated by this research, considerations should be made about the provision of feedback, the role of parents, why coaches choose a given communication method, individuality, and about the messages youth interpret from coaches following their release.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this descriptive research was to gain understanding about the methods used to inform youth of their non-selection within youth competitive sport, by speaking with coaches, athletes, and parents. In this study I investigated the role of team elimination communication methods in regard to the meanings and experiences of those involved. Specifically, the intent was to understand the varying perceptions people have towards their experiences around various methods of communication in team elimination, and how, or if, the meanings that are made affect their subsequent sport related decisions.

Research Questions

The broad questions that directed this study were:

1. What methods are being employed in order to communicate non-selection within youth team sports?
2. What role does the method of delivery of non-selection play in the creation of meanings, and in the future sport experiences of those involved in youth sport?
3. How are perceptions and meanings associated with the team elimination communication methods similar and/ or dissimilar amongst the coaches, athletes, and parents?

Significance of Study

Team selection processes are common to many sport contexts and may represent important experiences to all of those involved in these processes. This research is

significant due to the current gaps in the coaching education body of knowledge, specifically surrounding team elimination procedures. It is useful to know about the different ways coaches inform non-selected athletes within team elimination in competitive sport, and about what meanings those procedures have for adolescents. It is particularly important to look at the non-selection of adolescents due to the already alarming incidence of physical inactivity amongst youth. Thus, those interested in the health of youth; assuredly physical educators and coaches, ought to be concerned with knowing if, and how, team elimination methods are related to subsequent sport participation. It is also worthwhile to appreciate the unique and personal meanings attached by and within the different groups (coaches, athletes, and parents) to communication methods about non-selection in order to gain understanding about the similar and dissimilar ways each method can be perceived. This research will allow coaches to become aware of some of the meanings derived from various cutting methods and could in turn see how this information resonates with their own experiences with the assorted team elimination methods. It is anticipated that coaches may reconsider their practices when developing and undertaking team elimination procedures.

Operational Definitions

Sport: An adapted version of the definition offered by Coakley and Donnelly (2004) is used. For the purposes of this study sport is defined as: organized competitive activities that involve physical exertion by participants motivated by personal enjoyment and/ or external rewards. It is accepted that sport is not simply synonymous with play, leisure, recreation, or physical activity. It is, however, also noted that within the

definition, factors such as organized, competitive, and physical exertion exist on a continuum and thus can be present in varying amounts within sports intended for different participants and objectives.

Competitive Sport: The term competitive sport is used in this project to indicate any organized physical activity in which tryout processes are necessary. This can include team sports, or individual performance sports in which interested participants are required to audition for their place amongst others. For example, a situation in which a child must try out for a position within a junior tennis program for membership within a particular training team would be included under the competitive sport umbrella.

Team Elimination: The definition of team elimination for the purposes of this study refers to the latter part of the team selection process whereby coaches inform potential team members of their non-selection to the team. Terms such as 'cutting', 'being cut' and 'being released', are synonymous to the term team elimination and non-selection. To be clear, someone can be eliminated (or cut) from a team, and referred to as 'eliminated', however this does not indicate that they are necessarily completely eliminated (as in removed) from sport, or competitive sport forever. Someone may be eliminated, and later be selected for a team, or conversely, someone may experience multiple team elimination experiences. Furthermore, whilst someone may be eliminated from *competitive sport*, this does not necessarily suggest that they are absent from sport in general (as defined above).

Team Elimination Communication Methods: Team elimination communication methods refer to the different ways in which coaches inform potential members of their non-selection to the team.

Participants: Participants include all those coaches, athletes, and parents who were interviewed in the study.

Coaches: The definition of coach or coaches refers to those individuals responsible for leading individuals in sport and are those making, or significantly involved in, team elimination decisions.

Athletes: For the purposes of this study, athletes include not only the males and females chosen for membership within a competitive sport environment, but will also include those individuals who are not selected. Within this study, an athlete is someone who tries out for competitive amateur (non-paid) sport.

Parents: The term parent or parents refers to biological or non-biological full-time caregivers of non-selected athletes and is inclusive of step-parents.

Limitations

This study was limited by the fact that the participants were volunteers, and therefore even someone who may have a significant amount of insight to share about team elimination might have chosen not to participate. This research was also limited by logistical constraints such as financial resources. Also, certain potential participants with whom I would have liked to meet were inaccessible due to geographic location. Finally, I was limited to the information as offered by my participants which was mediated by their honesty, memory, and willingness to share.

Delimitations

This study did not presume to investigate the process of team selection in its entirety. Issues such as coaching philosophies, team selection criteria, and tryout procedures were not within the scope of this study. Certainly people are eliminated from competitive sport at many different ages, yet this study investigated the case surrounding those athletes who were eliminated during their young teenage years (13-15 years) from competitive amateur sports. Furthermore, although athletes may be eliminated from competitive sport at various times during the season, this study was confined to the inquiry of elimination communication methods during the initial pre-season tryouts. Perspectives from only three groups were sought in order to derive interpretations: coaches, athletes, and parents, and thus perspectives from others (such as peers) were not investigated.

The specific areas of investigation through interviewing for each of the three groups of participants evolved slightly over time, and the final list of main interview questions can be referenced in Appendix A.

CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In order to offer a comprehensive review of literature surrounding the case of team elimination methods, many related themes warrant investigation. Thus, while a literature search revealed no academic publications dealing specifically with different methods of informing youth of their non-selection to a team (sports team or otherwise), there are many contextual factors to consider. Literature pertaining to benefits of physical activity for adolescents, adolescent inactivity and obesity, and relationships between childhood and/ or adolescent physical activity participation and adulthood participation will be explored. Next, the rationale for choosing a particular age group to bind this study, while at the same time investigating some unique characteristics of adolescence, especially the significance of peers and parents is discussed. Finally, a review of research investigating team selection issues will be presented.

Benefits of Participation

The potential benefits of participation in, rather than exclusion from, physical activity are well documented and clear. Researched physical and medical benefits include an increase in efficient functioning of the body, weight maintenance, reduced risk for several degenerative diseases, and reduced risk for obesity (Canadian Academy of Sport Medicine, 2004; Thompson et al., 2003; Sallis & Patrick, 1994). Others note benefits especially pertinent to adolescent populations by noting that physical activity has the potential to: build and maintain healthy bones (including contributing towards healthy mineral content and peak bone mass), build lean muscle, reduce fat and control weight,

and prevent or delay the onset of high blood pressure, especially for youth at risk for hypertension (Bailey & Martin, 1994; National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2002; Robinson & Robinson, 2002; Sallis & Patrick, 1994). It is clear that nutritional considerations are also an important factor when investigating physical health, yet it is the combination of physical activity and nutritional sufficiency that is critical to physical health in adolescents (Bailey & Martin, 1994; Sallis & Patrick, 1994).

Sport and physical activity are hailed for offering non-physical benefits as well, and for adolescents sport is purported to: reduce anxiety and depression, improve mood, enhance ability to perform daily tasks (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2002; Calfas & Taylor, 1994), lead to more positive relationships with one's friends, higher self-esteem, enhanced time management skills, increase chances of completing high school, and contribute towards better scholastic achievements (Robinson & Robinson, 2002). Also specific to adolescents, Duncan (1993) notes that teenagers with more years of community sport participation have higher perceived competence in physical education, are more likely to cite personal attributions for achievement, have greater levels of companionship from friends who help them to develop a positive self image, and experience more positive affect such as happiness, pride, confidence, and satisfaction than their peers with fewer experiences in out-of-school physical activity.

Sallis and Patrick (1994) from the International Consensus Conference on Physical Activity Guidelines for Adolescents, and in light of the aforementioned information about the benefits of physical activity for youth offer the following guidelines:

> All adolescents should be physically active daily, or nearly every day, as part of play, games, sports, work, transportation, recreation, physical education, or planned exercise, in the context of family, school, and community activities (p. 307).
>
> Adolescents should engage in three or more sessions per week of activities that last 20 minutes or more at a time and that require moderate to vigorous levels of exertion (p. 308)

Unfortunately, even with the wealth of literature noting the many potential benefits of physical activity amongst adolescent populations, and the associated activity guidelines, many youth are not participating in regular physical activity (Robinson & Robinson, 2002).

Inactivity and Associated Risks

It is noted that 60% of Canadian children and youth aged 5-17 "are not active enough for optimal growth and development" (Robinson & Robinson, 2002, p. 3). Not only are youth alarmingly inactive, but there are indications that this population is becoming more inactive with time. For example, amongst youth aged 11-15, physical activity rates dropped 30% between 1990 and 1998 (Robinson & Robinson, 2002). Furthermore, there are strong indications that physical activity pursuits decline from childhood into adolescence and that this trend is even more salient for females (Trost et al., 2002; National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 1999; Pate, Long, & Heath, 1994). Tremblay and colleagues highlight that the prevalence of obesity, which has been noted as being significantly related to inactivity, is on the rise in

Canada within the child and adolescent populations and it has been calculated that incidence of obesity doubled between 1981 and 1996 for those aged 7-13, (Tremblay & Willms, 2000; Tremblay, Katzmarzyk, & Willms, 2002; Ferraro, Thorpe, & Wilkinson, 2003). This is alarming, especially in light of the research suggesting that obesity during childhood and adolescence is significantly related to severe obesity for men and women in adulthood, and that obesity carries increased risks of heart disease and type II diabetes (Ferraro et al., 2003).

Furthermore, teenagers who are overweight often experience generally poorer levels of overall health, are less satisfied with their bodies, are more likely to receive lower grades, and are more likely to be discriminated against due to their physical appearance (McCreary Centre Society, 2004). Finally, given the age of interest for this research study, it is worth noting that being overweight when aged 12-13 is a very strong predictor of being overweight in adulthood, and that obesity at 15-16 "has an even stronger relationship with adult obesity" (Ferraro et al., 2003, p. S117). The Canadian Academy of Sport Medicine (2004), notes that obese adolescents have a 70% to 80% of becoming obese adults. It is then quite clear that reduced levels of physical activity are related to being overweight, and put people at risk for life-long health concerns. Luckily, although inactive behaviours are noticeably consistent throughout a lifespan, so too are active lifestyles.

Activity into Adulthood

Seefeldt, Malina, and Clark (2002) offer a comprehensive review of articles noting the positive association between childhood and adolescent physical activity

participation with participation during adulthood. Thompson, Humbert, and Mirwald (2003) and Pate el al. (1994) also discuss this trend and note that the quality of childhood and adolescent participation is critical in predicting adult activity. Thompson and colleagues (2003) state, "positive experiences during childhood and/ or adolescence had a lasting influence on adult level[s] of physical activity" (p. 375). What is also important is the suggestion that adolescence might be the critical period "at which the roots for developing a preference for physical activity or inactivity becomes more firmly established (Thompson et al., 2003, p. 375). It is then apparent that non-voluntary exclusion from physical activity in the form of team elimination is counter-intuitive towards the goal of retaining and/ or increasing participation rates amongst children and youth, and that any potential relationship between elimination communication methods and continued lifelong participation in physical activity is worth exploring.

The Experience of Teenagers

In addition to research suggesting that physical activity during adolescence has direct and long-term benefits, adolescence is also a time marked by many significant milestones. Boyce (2004), in his Health Canada report on Canadian Adolescence, notes that early adolescence is often viewed as a critical period of development. Adolescence, and more particularly early adolescence, is a time of transition and has often been likened to having "one foot in the world of childhood and another in the world of adults" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000, p. 6). It is during the adolescent period that puberty occurs, which is marked by sudden and rapid growth, which may lead to temporary losses in balance and coordination (National Association for Sport and

Physical Education, 2002). Psychosocial changes arise as teenagers are more reliant on their peers than during childhood, and thus, friends act as strong socializing agents (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). The teenage years are also often characterized by lower feelings of self-esteem, and adolescents are often more "sensitive to criticism about personal shortcomings" (National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2002, n.p.). Dworkin and Larson (2005) also suggest the state of flux distinguishing teenage years, "may make youth more vulnerable to negative identity experiences" (p. 10). It is also an age where participation in sport has a marked importance (Pease, Locke, & Burlingame, 1971).

Perhaps most relevant to this research, is Jean Côté's work surrounding his sport development model (1999). Côté's model supports a healthy developmental approach to sport participation for he suggests that children and youth ought to follow a path that ensures "a focus on fundamental motor skills in early childhood to more sport-specific skills in adolescence" (Baker, Côté, & Abernethy, 2003, p. 14). Côté also describes that the three-stage journey through sampling, specializing, and investment is "according to positive physical, psychological, and social development patterns" (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, Deakin, 2005, p. 31), and that the youth aged 13-15 are likely in their specializing years, and are thus attempting to reduce the number of sports they sample in favour of becoming more proficient within one or two sporting domains (Côté, 1999; Côté & Hay 2002; Soberlak & Côté, 2003). It is noted that whilst the aim of fun and excitement remain of paramount importance during this stage, a committed amount of sport-specific training and skill development become important to athletes wishing to continue through this stage (Côté & Hay, 2002; Baker, Côté, & Deakin, 2005).

Côté notes that this is the time when certain "adolescents may become more committed and serious about their sport involvement", while most other adolescents are likely to drop out from sports (Côté, 1999, p. 405; Côté & Hay 2002). Côté and Hay (2002) note that many teenagers of this age drop out of sport when they are not afforded the chance to demonstrate nor "enjoy using their talent" (p. 494). Noting what happens to those youth who attempt to remain and specialize in sport, but are unsuccessful, seems not only interesting, but worthwhile. Furthermore, it is suggested that "while a path through the sampling, specializing, and investment years can lead to expertise, more understanding of the training and psychological factors that lead to recreational sport participation and complete drop out from sport is required" (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005, p. 33). It is apparent that an investigation into the meanings surrounding the elimination of youth by varying communication methods, and the associated sport participation decisions and sentiments, particularly by those at this critical age, is presently lacking and potentially worthwhile.

Peers and Parents

It is important to note that even though adolescents may socialize more frequently with friends and depend on their peers for more acceptance than when younger, that their parents remain strong figures of influence throughout adolescence (Atwater, 1996; Berndt, 1979; Health Canada, 2004; Ryan, 2001). It is noted that teenagers are likely to depend on their parents for guidance on important issues, and it is suggested that athletic exclusion may be one such issue (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000). It is clear that although adolescents may strive for increased autonomy, and may cite their

friends as being their main sounding boards, many teenagers admit that for significant issues, it is their parents' advice that they seek (ibid.). Furthermore, when asked, many teenagers acknowledge that their parents are the people they respect the most (ibid). Health Canada (2004) echoes this by noting how "most adolescents consider their parents as primary attachment figures, even as their social allegiances shift more towards their peers" (p. 121). It then makes sense to seek the input of parents in research about the experiences of their teenagers, particularly regarding more pertinent issues or events.

Seeking the perspective of parents about the circumstances surrounding the elimination from a team by a certain method of communication does not take away from the importance of peer acceptance. Although teenagers may rely upon their parents for guidance, the issues requiring direction may be directly related to their peers. That is, it is likely that an event like the elimination from a competitive sport context, and thus the likely exclusion from a given peer group, may be just the kind of issue about which teenagers need advice. This is due to the significance of peer acceptance amongst this age group, and the meanings associated with forced exclusion. It is clear that peer acceptance is very important to adolescents, and that physical competencies are often related to this (Atwater, 1996; Smith, 1999; Weiss & Duncan, 1992).

Many studies note that being accepted by one's peers during adolescence is very important (Ryan, 2001; Atwater, 1996; Health Canada 2004; Berndt, 1982), and that being physically competent is often associated with acceptance (Smith, 1999; Weiss & Duncan, 1992; Atwater, 1996). For many adolescents and their peer groups, being an athlete is important in determining acceptance and popularity, particularly amongst males (Weiss & Duncan, 1992; Atwater, 1996). I am not suggesting that having an athletic

identity is crucial for all adolescents, but there is something to be said for teenagers who make attempts to solidify and enhance their athletic identity during these specializing years, and then are excluded from participating (Côté & Hay, 2002). Certainly the degree of significance one's athletic identity provides, as well as the reliance upon this for peer acceptance is variable. It is nonetheless important to know how these factors interact when a teenager is excluded from participation after an unsuccessful tryout. Furthermore, the actual manner in which the non-selected youth was informed of their tryout result seems not only extremely relevant but also worthwhile in learning about the context of what surely would usually be considered bad news.

Team Elimination

A review of articles written on team elimination makes it clear that most authors are more interested in discussing the criteria behind the team elimination process, than the consequences of their decisions, let alone any considerations for the various methods coaches employ to deliver the news of non-selection. Work by Evans (1986; 1988) investigates motives behind playground team selection decisions amongst elementary school-aged children. He reports that children's team making decisions revolve a great deal around issues of gender stereotypes and friendship circles. Articles such as those by Findlay and Corbett (2002), and Drakich et al. (1997) expose the need for transparency within the high performance team selection criteria, yet it is acknowledged that "team selection is always complex and highly emotional; it is at the heart of every coach's job" (Drakich et al., 1997, p. 4). The significance of the task is also alluded to by Findlay and Corbett (2002) who state, "cutting players from a team is perhaps the hardest part of the

coach's job" (p. 41). Clearly though, it is the need to be objective that dominates available literature in the area of team selection.

An article by Larsen (1995) details a process he contends to be the solution to team selection dilemmas. He advocates the worth of his computer program, which is essentially a statistical method of evaluating volleyball players allowing the software to choose the 'best' players. An article with a promising title; one that leads you to think that tryout communication methods will be discussed, *Tryouts Without Tears* (Bock, 1995), also deals solely with the objectivity and clarity of the audition process. This article, written within the context of dramatic production auditions for children notes:

> The potential for tears and disappointment is great for both students and parents. How do you minimize hard feelings? While there's no easy fix, I've found that preparing everyone for the tryout process and getting organized ahead of time saves a lot of tears (p. 62).

Bock describes plans like educating potential participants of the tryout expectations, making children aware of the alternative roles within the dramatic production before they decide to audition for acting parts, and ensuring that everyone understands the required commitment before audition decisions are finalized. However, nowhere does he suggest that the manner in which audition results are communicated matters. So although these authors recognize the severity of the cutting process, there is a lack of attention to explicit guidelines for communicating the tryout decisions. This may reflect the assumption that if objective criteria are set prior to the tryouts, the manner of delivery of the news is irrelevant. To me, this is a dangerous assumption to make.

There are researchers concerned with factors other than the selection criteria, yet most of this literature is situated in a previous time period some three decades ago. Terry Orlick and Cal Botterill's *Every Kid Can Win* (1975) brought widespread attention to the gloomy side of youth sport. They criticized a system that acclaims the values of sport for youth while at the same time restricts their participation. They called for the eradication of team elimination within youth sport, citing the many negative consequences associated with being cut from a team, and asked coaches and administrators to reconsider the values of youth sport. They questioned the need for placing winning at the top of the list of priorities within youth sport, and demanded that participation be held in higher regard. The use of narratives, stories, or testimonials of children who were eliminated from sports teams served as powerful voices advocating for more inclusive practices. Lebovitz (1978) writes in a similar style and after presenting the typical story of a boy being cut from a football team asks coaches if they would really like to re-enact the scene, by posing the question, "So Coach, hold that knife. Why plunge it into a boy's heart?" (p. 144).

Presented with a similar style is Blinde and Stratta's (1992) article about the 'sport career death'; the title they attributed to a sudden involuntary exit from sport. The morbid tone laces the description of 20 college athletes' experiences with sudden sport exits. It is explained that for many of these athletes who's athletic career ended (either by being personally cut from the program, or by the elimination of the entire sport program), the sentiments surrounding this experience equated to the devastation of the death of a loved one. Coping methods are discussed in this article and similarly in Munroe, Albinson, and Hall's (1999) article also about varsity athletes dealing with non-selection.

Team elimination was also discussed by Grove, Fish, and Eklund (2004) who note, not surprisingly, that those eliminated from elite sport teams begin to identify themselves less as athletes than do their peers who are chosen for membership within the sport program. Although these articles bring attention to some of the depressing aspects of being eliminated from a given competitive sport program, little is learned about the manner in which the bad news is delivered, nor are any long-term perspectives offered.

An opinion article by Demarchant (1992) which focuses mainly on the process of hosting high school volleyball tryouts (such as guidelines for training camps, conditioning programs, and team selecting criteria) actually does contain some advice about the manner of delivering tryout news. He states that coaches take the easy way out when they simply post a list of names of those players selected and argues that this is the "least desirable method" (p. 55). He explains: "when players have worked hard and given their best effort, the least you can do is to let them down gently. A good way to do this is through short meetings with the individuals or, if this is impossible, through personal notes" (p. 55). He advises that through these means players are able to learn their strengths, areas requiring more practice, and specific strategies that can be put in place in order to become stronger players. While this testimonial offers some insight into one coach's rational for proceeding with team eliminations, we learn little about why he came to this conclusion. He does not document his own personal 'evidence', anecdotal or otherwise. When this is the only retrievable article dealing with methods of communication of tryout results, the need for further research in this area is clear.

Finally, while the appeals of authors such as Orlick & Botterill (1975), Lebovitz (1978), Blinde & Stratta (1992) are heartfelt and at times dramatic, the elimination of

children and youth from sport continues. Given the continued popularity of competitive youth sport at many levels, I might contend that some of these authors were somewhat utopian in their assumptions and contentions. So instead of calling for the end of the practice of team elimination in youth sports, I think the field instead requires information about the varying methods within team selection and knowledge about the meanings of those practices for those involved.

Thus, even though I might agree that exclusion itself is counterintuitive in a society where health promotion is its own academic field, and that participation (not exclusion) in/from physical activity has associated benefits, and that the consequences of being eliminated might be unfavourable, I think an investigation into the options coaches have in communicating their decisions is necessary. Pease and colleagues suggest that one of the "crucial questions remaining" in this domain is that of "how does the coach and/ or athlete perceive the exclusion process?" (Pease et al., 1971, p. 46). If we are interested in encouraging youth to pursue healthy lifestyles then an exploration into the meanings people attribute to the various methods of informing unsuccessful team members of their non-selection during adolescence is warranted, as is the investigation of how those meanings and interpretations may effect subsequent sport-related decisions.

Summary

It is clear that many potential benefits of inclusion within sport and physical activity participation have been studied and celebrated, while the many risks involved with non-participation have also received notable attention. There is strong research noting links between childhood and adolescent health to associated levels during

adulthood. It is concerning that during adolescence many youth will try to forge their sports identity by specializing within a certain sport, but that many teenagers who try out for each team will not be successful. There are some who believe that the process of elimination within youth sport is uncalled-for. However, if one accepts the fact that team selection processes will go on, season after season, within many sports at many levels and that many youth will be eliminated, it is thus essential to begin to understand what consequences arise out of the numerous methods used to inform youth of their non-selection.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

A Case for Qualitative Inquiry

Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg (1992) make clear that "choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked" (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 4). I would argue that my research interest and research questions about the meanings of elimination methods from competitive sport calls for qualitative inquiry. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative inquiry by contending, "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). Since I am interested in knowing about the meanings people attribute to team elimination in youth sport, and what those meanings bring about in terms of subsequent behaviour, I think that qualitative inquiry is the obvious choice. Furthermore, qualitative inquiry accepts multiple versions of reality. Under this perspective, different people may experience and interpret the same things in different ways, and asserts that no one truth can exist and be privileged amongst other versions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I accept this line of thinking for I believe that the processes of team elimination are complex, and that many different meanings and interpretations can and do arise. I am uninterested in measuring effects of cutting, rather in knowing about different people's experiences with and around cutting.

Qualitative research emphasizes an in-depth investigation of phenomena in which processes, experiences, and meanings are interpreted with the understanding that reality is socially constructed and defined (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This would imply that cutting is defined differently by different people and that shared understandings of the phenomenon are a result of contextual factors within a given time and place. Qualitative

inquiry allows for the investigation of multiple meanings, shared or oppositional truths, and investigations into phenomena without cause or concern for normalcy. I wished to know about all sorts of experiences with cutting and was prepared to, and did accept and give equal value to all meanings associated with the youth cutting process. Qualitative inquiry supports these aims and was thus the only logical choice for my research project.

Epistemology - Constructionism

One's epistemology guides their understanding of how we come to know what we know (Crotty, 1998). My research undertook a constructionist epistemology, in which it is believed that no one truth exists waiting to be discovered. Under a constructionist worldview "meaning is not discovered, but constructed" (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). Crotty offers an expanded definition:

> [Constructionism] is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essential social context (p. 42).

In assuming this epistemology, I acknowledge and recognize that each team elimination context is unique as is socially defined by those involved. I recognize that there is no one meaning of cutting, of being cut, or by being informed of one's non-selection via a certain communication method, and that the sense one makes out of the experience is unique to each individual but is shaped by his or her social context. It is furthermore agreed that meanings surrounding cutting (or otherwise) can and did change as social contexts, and time periods change, and thus the meaning of cutting for individuals may be

shaped within the very process of my research. This means that my findings are similarly bound within certain contexts for each individual.

Theoretical Perspective - Interpretivism

Accepting Crotty's (1998) definition of interpretivism in which he states that this theoretical perspective is about looking "for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (p. 67), entails a rejection of Schwandt's (2000) definition in which he believes that interpretivists are concerned with the objectification of what is to be interpreted. Schwandt contends, "The interpreter remains unaffected by and external to the interpretive process" (p. 194). Furthermore, Ellis' (1998a) explanation of interpretivism is consistent with Crotty, (and thus incompatible with Schwandt), as she notes that a constant back and forth between projection and evaluation is essential in interpretivism. Borrowed from hermeneutic inquiry, Ellis notes that one may initially interpret a phenomenon in a particular way, a way based on one's "preconceptions, pre-understandings, or prejudices", but that through the process of inquiry and engagement with the phenomenon (including engagement with participants themselves) that one evaluates and "reconsiders the interpretation by re-examining the data for confirmation, contradictions, gaps, or inconsistencies" (p. 26). While Ellis names the two processes of interpretation as projection and evaluation, I would contend that the evaluated interpretation could be likened to a constructed or collaborative interpretation. Crotty (1998) and Ellis (1998a) thus maintain the contextual, or constructed meaning, which considers the social contribution towards a given interpretation, is at the foundation of interpretivism.

In aligning myself within Ellis' (1998a) and Crotty's (1998) definitions of interpretivism, I understood that my interpretations can and should change throughout my research project, and in some cases this occurred. I furthermore embraced the direct and subtle feedback from the participants of my study in forming my interpretations of their meanings and experiences within the team elimination context. It is also important to address the fact that as an interpretivist I accept responsibility for my interpretations. Ellis adds that interpretivists "do not seek a uniquely correct or 'accurate' interpretation, but rather the most adequate one that can be developed at that time" (1998b, p. 27). This means that in accepting responsibility for my interpretations, I in no way imply to have found or discovered the correct interpretation of the phenomenon of youth cutting in sports, yet that I have derived the most suitable interpretations within this particular social context.

Methodology – Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Smith and Osborn (2003) note that the aim of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) "is to explore in detail how participants mak[e] sense of their personal and social world" (p. 51). This approach honours the individual experience each person has when considering team eliminations and seeks to "find out how individuals perceiv[e] the particular situation" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53). IPA is concerned with "understanding what the particular respondent thinks or believes about the topic under discussion" (Smith, Jarmen, & Osborn, 1999, p. 219). Furthermore, it is stated that IPA is all the more suitable when the research question is concerned with a complex process, or when exploring novel areas (Smith & Osborn, 2003); conditions aptly relevant for athlete

elimination communication methods to be explored here. Consistent with my epistemology of constructionism, and my theoretical perspective of interpretivism, IPA maintains that predetermined hypotheses are not sought after; rather the aim of this kind of qualitative research "is to explore, flexibly and in detail, an area of concern" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53). The methodological choice of IPA allows for interpretive inquiry to take place and ensures that the subjective reality surrounding the team elimination experiences is not only maintained, yet is focal.

The dynamic process between the researcher and the interpretation of individual accounts are noted by Smith (1996) in introducing this qualitative methodology:

> Access is both dependant on and complicated by, the researcher's own conceptions which are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretive activity (p. 264).

Not only is my awareness of personal bias acknowledged in this kind of research, but it is inherent and built into the entire methodology.

Research Design – Interviews

The method of data collection was achieved through interviewing. Smith and Osborn (2003) support the choice of interviews as the primary and most exemplary method of collecting data for IPA research. Qualitative interviews, according to Patton (2002), "begin with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (p. 341). If I can accept that 'explicit' means clear, or open, as opposed to precise or accurate, then these assumptions are very congruent with my understandings and justifications for selecting an interview process.

It makes sense to me to be in direct conversation with someone in order to gain in-depth information, and clarity into what someone is expressing. I liked the idea of being able to ask probing questions; questions that asked more about what had been said – in more detail, with more context. I do not feel like this would have been achieved in a manner compatible with the aims of this study through questionnaires or any other measurement instruments.

It is clear that there are many different types of qualitative interviews, and oftentimes different labels are applied to the same interview type (deMarris, 2004). What one might call in-depth, another might call open-ended, unstructured, informal, or conversational (ibid). What is common amongst these terms is that they generally imply an "informal, conversational style of the interview process, which enables the participants to engage in the process more freely without merely responding to researcher-generated questions" (p. 53). From Patton's (2002) description of 'Informal Conversational Interviews' I borrowed the idea that interview questions evolve between each interview as "each new interview builds on those already done, expanding information that was picked up previously, moving in new directions, and seeking elucidations and elaborations from various participants" (p. 342). Although the description of this interview style does not include the use of a guide (even a very basic focusing guide), Patton himself recognizes the usefulness of combining interview strategies. It is noted that "a conversational strategy can be used within an interview guide approach with…specif[ied] certain key questions" (p. 347). It was my intention to have very open, flowing interviews, with several important questions to be covered during the course of the discussion. In some cases the questions were touched upon during natural

conversation, in other cases they were directly asked, and this was dependent upon the context of each individual interview. For the list of questions that were covered during the interviews please refer to Appendix A.

Mishler's (1986) perception on interviews as explained in deMarrais (2004) concerns the interpretive or constructionist nature of interviews, which is of particular relevance to my study, deMarris explains,

> Interviews are not simply exchanges of questions and answers by researchers and participants, but a form of discourse where the researcher and participant engage in co-constructing meaning within a particular type of social relationship (p. 54).

It is then clear that not only did I interpret the many meanings surrounding the cutting process from the perspective of others, but that the meanings that were discussed and interpreted were partly shaped by the very conversation enquiring about them. This is simply an acceptance of the constructionist epistemology that recognizes the collaborative and contextual effects in shaping realities.

Participants

In investigating the case of cutting through in-depth interviews, I spoke to three groups of people. I spoke to coaches who perform team selection processes regularly (at least annually), of youth aged 13 to 15 in order to understand the meanings about cutting methods from the coaches' perspective. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their meanings, I sought to interview coaches with significant experience, and varied experiences with the team selection process. It was thus stipulated that coaches in my study had at least 5 team selection coaching experiences. I

interviewed 5 coaches from different competitive sports; both school and community based. It was and is rationalized that since the meanings surrounding cutting and cutting methods are unique and contextually specific, to try to distinguish between different sports, or different settings (school or community) is illogical. Thus while some comparisons are drawn between the different sport settings represented in this research, the aim was to gain a holistic perspective surrounding the issue and so the decision was made not to exclude specific kinds or settings of sport.

In order to appreciate the perspective of those who have been eliminated, I spoke to people who were cut from a sports team when they were 13 to 15. I interviewed 5 individuals in their mid-twenties or older who were cut from any team sports team when they were 13-15. The rational for stipulating the current age of study participants was rooted in the belief that people who were *just* cut from a sports team are not able to speak to any long-term outcomes of their experience and meaning within a particular method of cutting.

Parents were also involved; for their input and their experiences in their child's cutting experience is important to the interpretation of this issue. Five parents, who consisted of mothers or fathers at the time of the cutting, were targeted. Only one parent from each family was interviewed to allow for a greater range of informants. Criteria for their inclusion maintained that at least one of their children was cut from competitive sport when aged 13 to 15 years, and that this had to have happened at least five years ago.

Participant Recruitment

Participants for the study were recruited through purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) notes how purposeful sampling allows for "information-rich cases" to be chosen and studied and that these cases are "those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the study" (p. 230). Stake (2003) supports the usefulness and appropriateness of purposeful sampling by contending that this sampling choice has the "potential for learning [that] is a different and sometimes superior criterion to representativeness" (p. 152), and Smith and Osborn (2003) contend that purposeful sampling is most appropriate for IPA research. The aim of my study was *not* to speak to a representative sample of the 'cut population', but was to talk to different people from a variety of cutting experiences in order to best describe and understand their meanings and experiences.

Thus, I sought to hear from individuals who were interested in speaking about their experiences and meanings of team elimination while covering the various elimination methods. To inform potential participants, I used word of mouth within the coaching and sport community, and snowball sampling in which potential or actual participants were involved in targeting other potential or actual participants (Patton, 2002). Patton adds that snowball sampling is particularly effective for deriving purposeful samples for it involves asking people questions like 'Whom should I talk to about___?'or 'Who knows a lot about ___' (p. 237). It was important to me that participants could speak from cutting experiences from any sport, and within any domain (school or community). To be clear, all of my participants were adults, and were recruited by using my personal and professional contacts. After outlining my inclusion

criteria (as outlined in the previous section), I asked people that should they, or someone they know, be interested in being involved in this research, that more information could be received by contacting me.

Those interested or recommended for participation had the research intentions explained to them (either in person, over e-mail, or verbally over the phone), and, if interested, were given the research information letter. All potential participants became aware of the non-obligatory nature of their participation, and understood that anyone could cease participating at any time. All participants knew that if requested, their information would be removed from the research. Those wishing to participate completed the informed consent forms after having had it explained to them, and interviews were scheduled at times most convenient to the participant.

Meet the Participants

The coach participants involved in this project were:

Alyson – Coaches in the sport of synchronized skating from the developmental levels up to and including National and International teams. She has been coaching for roughly 20 years and has held team tryouts and eliminations well over 50 times – most of which covering the 13-15 age grouping studied here.

Will – Coaches in the sport of football at the community, school, provincial, and university levels. Most of his experience is with youth under 15 years, and he also works with the Provincial Football Association in his province.

Dave – Coaches in the sport of hockey, and has been doing so for over 15 years. He most recently has focused his coaching energies on the Bantam Triple A level which deals with youth (almost always boys) aged 13-15.

Leigh – Coaches in the sport of soccer, and coaches girls' teams. She began coaching her daughter's teams and has coached multiple levels, yet focuses on the community level in her coaching.

Rick – Coaches in the sport of girls' ringette. He has coached club, community, and provincial level teams, many of which match the age group of this research.

The athlete participants involved in this project were:

Sarah – Spoke to her experiences being cut from community baseball and school volleyball but is extremely involved in many sports and noted that she has been involved in over 35 tryouts.

John – Spoke to his experience being eliminated from school basketball, yet noted his participation in many other school and community sport programs.

Meg – Spoke to her experience being eliminated from school volleyball yet offered comparisons to her experiences in soccer, and basketball.

Brett – Spoke about his experience of being eliminated in hockey and offered comparisons to other experiences within hockey and in baseball.

Erin – Spoke about her experience of being eliminated from school volleyball and drew comparisons to many other tryouts and sports in which she has and remains to be involved.

The parent participants involved in this project were:

Heather – Spoke about her son's elimination experience in hockey. She has two sons who were involved in multiple sports, one of which is still highly involved at an elite level of hockey.

Adrienne – Spoke about her daughter's elimination experience in volleyball at the provincial level. She was able to draw comparisons between this experience and other tryouts in which her two daughters were involved.

Julia – Spoke about her son's elimination experience in hockey in relation to other tryout experiences had by both her sons.

Mary – Spoke about her two sons' elimination experiences in basketball, and volleyball. All three of her children were and continue to be active in sports and she was able to draw upon memories from many of their tryout experiences.

Marc – Spoke about his son's elimination from school basketball in relation to his three other children's experiences in a wide variety of sports and activities.

Analysis

The analysis of the transcripts, and of any notes taken, was done in accordance to the guidelines set out for IPA research by Smith and Osborn (2003). It is worthwhile to note however, that Smith, Jarmen, and Osborn (1999) state that "There is no single definitive way to do qualitative analysis" (p. 220) and note that practical guidelines are meant only to assist researchers whose own personal interpretation style is crucial. Under IPA analysis, the objective is to interpret the meanings, rather than measure frequency of any given 'type' of response. Analysis began immediately following the first session of data collection, for there was a continual back and forth interaction between data

collection and analysis. Patton (2002) calls this back and forth an 'interplay', occurring between researchers and data, for it is only through initial interpretations of data that new directions, or further probing into unpredicted areas will occur. Thus, after several readings of the transcript or interview notes, personal notes were made in the margins in order to annotate interesting or significant areas mentioned by participants (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

What is perhaps unique to analysis under the IPA methodology, is that there are no rules or requirements to, for example divide a certain number of experiences into a certain number of meaning units or categories. Smith and Osborn (2003) are explicit in this point, in noting how "some parts of the interview will be richer than others and so warrant more commentary", and so there is no need to make equal amounts of interpretation for each section of interviews (p. 67). Likewise, the number of times a theme or meaning unit is present is not as relevant as the richness it represents for Smith and colleagues (1999) warn:

> The themes are not selected purely on the basis of their prevalence within the data. Other factors, included the richness of the particular passages with highlight the themes, and how the theme helps illuminate other aspects of the account, are also taken into account (p. 236).

Analysis proceeded from here as emerging themes were expressed (either on the other margin or on a separate piece of paper) all the while attempting to "capture the essential quality of what was found in the text" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 68). Some themes re-emerged time and time again, whereas new themes became apparent within the same and amongst different interview transcripts. Themes were then examined for

connectedness to each other; within and across different interviews. The last stage involved translating the themes of the interviews and notes into a final report inclusive of narrative accounts. Follow-up correspondence with participants offered participants the opportunity to contribute towards the written interpretations of their meanings and experiences.

Quality or Goodness of Research

Criteria for judging quality in qualitative work must be judged by criteria dissimilar to quantitative pursuits (Patton, 2002). Issues of validity, reliability, and generalizability as understood from positivist empirical perspectives and epistemologies are not relevant when evaluating the merit of qualitative work. Patton (2002) offers several 'Alternate Sets of Criteria for Judging the Quality and Credibility of Qualitative Inquiry', from which portions of the 'Social Construction and Constructivist Criteria' will be employed. Under this criteria the following issues are important:

- Subjectivity acknowledged

This means that I discussed and took into account my personal biases at all points during the research project. This was accomplished through the ongoing exercise of documenting 'conceptual baggage'. Conceptual baggage was continually updated in Appendix B.

- Triangulation (capturing and respecting multiple perspectives)

To highlight what is meant by triangulation from a qualitative research point of view, Stake (2003) offers a valuable explanation:

> Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation. But acknowledging that no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomenon is being seen (p. 148).

By speaking with different groups of people (coaches, athletes, and parents), and by continually being engaged in interpretivism from a constructionist approach, I attempted to triangulate the data, and was thus better positioned to interpret and report upon varied and unique meanings.

- Reflexivity and Praxis

I will also highlight Patton's elaboration on the criterion involving praxis and reflexivity in which he makes clear that qualitative researchers have "findings and reports [that] are explicitly informed by attention to praxis and reflexivity, that is, understanding how one's own experiences and background affect what one understands and how one acts in the world" (p. 546). So while I have already been upfront about my hopes for making an impact in the coaching education body of knowledge (knowledge that I understand has the potential to have very real effects on youth coaching), I have also been forthright about the assumptions I brought to this inquiry. I have also recognized the nature of constructed interpretation, and concede that my interpretations are mine, are subject to alternative interpretations, yet were founded in co-constructed understandings of the issues discussed. This also means that interpretations were generated after several discussions with interviewees; opportunities for my research participants to verify the content and interpretation of their contributions.

- Particularity

In order to achieve particularity I have ensured that it is not only the common or most 'regular' cases that were sought and reported. Honouring particularity means giving integrity to unique cases; those that may be dismissed as outliers in more traditional research. This research aimed to capture many different experiences with the various communication methods involved with team elimination, and no certain kind was desirable (as research material) over any others.

- Enhanced and deepened understanding

This research intends to advance knowledge in the field of coaching. Prior to this research project, information about how competitive sport tryout results are communicated was unavailable, and this new information will deepen our understanding about tryout procedures. It is expected that coaches will be able to see how the information presented in this research matches with what they know and do with regards to sport tryouts. This research will hopefully have an impact on the way coaches decide to inform their athletes of their non-selection.

Smith (1999) suggests that a good way to test a project's impact is to ask, does it "actually tell us anything useful or important, or [does it] make any difference?" (p. 234). He continues and notes that asking what "contribution the study can make in terms of social change or practice" is equally important in gauging if the research has led to deepened understandings which can and should lead to informed choices and actions (p. 234). To reiterate, I hope that this research is considered accessible by practicing coaches, and that the recommendations made here help stakeholders in youth sport make more informed choices.

Risks

There are no major risks associated with this study. Given that the method of collecting information was interviewing and note taking, there may have been some risk associated with the disclosure of personal and/ or sensitive information. This had the potential to make some participants feel uncomfortable yet this was not the case with any of my participants. To further reduce this risk, after I transcribed the interviews, made my interpretations, and wrote my analysis, I gave each participant the opportunity to review their contributions and my interpretations of them. Member checking is thus important in addressing goodness of research, but also helped alleviate any potential fears the participants may have had in being misrepresented.

Benefits

The potential benefit arising from participation in this study is that participants may have come to a better understanding of the tryout process and specifically about the methods of communication used to inform athletes of their non-selection. The information that I have collected and presented may provide guidance to other coaches and sport administrators about the different ways of cutting youth. Information from this study might help coaches know how people feel about the ways that athletes can be informed of their non-selection. It is hoped that research like this will encourage player eliminations (cutting) to be as appropriate as possible, and that interest in this area is increased, resulting in subsequent research projects in the area.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Because the interviews were audio-recorded, it was important to keep these records safe and confidential. Instead of using the participants' names, pseudonyms were assigned, and participants have not been personally identified. The voice recordings from the interviews were transcribed, and are protected on a personal computer under password. Printed copies were stored in a locked file cabinet within a locked office, to which only the researcher has access. Personal team elimination documents that were submitted had names removed, and were also stored in a locked cabinet. The information will be kept for five years after a publication is done, and after this time it will be destroyed.

CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the manner in which the findings are presented and the rationale underlying this format. First, it will be noted that the shared appreciation for the difficulties involved in communicating tryout results as well as the shared understanding that the manner in which tryout decisions are communicated have different and significant consequences. I will next list the inventory of team selection communication methods described by my participants. From there, perspectives and meanings surrounding the different communication methods will be explored as they relate to the numerous themes and sub-themes.

Three Groups No Longer: More Overlap than Distinctions

Even though three separate groups of participants were interviewed: athletes, coaches, and parents, the findings of this research will not be presented in a way that separates these groups from one another. The responses of the participants did not consistently align themselves according to these three groups; rather the perspectives and meanings discussed were sometimes overlapping and sometimes differing across the three groups. That is, the information from parents was no more similar to other parents than it was to athletes, and so it makes little sense to try to create boundaries around these three groups of participants. The emergence of other ways to consider or sort participant information became apparent, as themes and sub-themes appeared across the groups. The findings will thus be presented with respect to the themes and sub-themes concerning the different methods of communication. At some points it will be relevant to discuss

answers with respect to the three specific participant groups, but this is not the norm; rather it will be the exception.

A Shared Appreciation for a Difficult Task, Yet the Method Matters

Nearly every single participant noted their recognition of the difficulty involved in telling youth that they are unsuccessful in making a team. If there was one single area where a 'consensus' might be declared it would be here: delivering this bad news is a horrible job.

Without prompt, coaches were willing to highlight their anxiety and dislike for the tryout period of the season and a selection of their direct sentiments include:

> "I think it's one of the more unpleasant things about sport" (Will, p.2).

> "It's stressful for everybody. We call it, and you might know it too: the hardest part of the season. It's the most trying part, it's the most stressful part; you lose sleep over it. I don't sleep well pre-season" (Dave, p. 23).

> "It's probably the hardest thing to do - to cut a child and whether 11 or 17, it's so hard" (Leigh, p. 2).

> "I always hated the calls. I always dreaded the call, even if the people were nice about it, and said thanks for the opportunity and hung up. You still felt bad. You know they're sad" (Leigh, p. 10).

These sentiments were echoed by athletes and parents who imagined themselves in the shoes of coaches and struggled with the thought of having to deliver team selection news to youth. Their thoughts included:

> "You have to remember that a lot of these coaches, they hate cutting, for one thing. They absolutely hate it" (Heather, p. 7).

> "I think it would be really, really hard and not pleasant at all, only because I'm the type who sees some kids who try really, really hard and you want to keep them all, but you can't. I just think it would be really difficult" (Heather, p. 15).

> "I'm glad I'm not a coach. I'd really need to think about it" (Julia, p. 8).

> "That's hard to do. I know it's hard to do" (Adrienne, p. 10).

> "To cut kids, man, it's hard. It's really hard" (Heather, p. 19).

Whilst all agreed that making cuts, or rather actually having to tell youth that they did not make a competitive sport program, is likely one of most uncomfortable parts of coaching, most also noted that the manner in which the news was delivered is important. This was good news to me as the researcher! The assumption I had made was that the method of delivery could be considered separately from the actual result of being

eliminated or cut. When embarking in this research I assumed that *how* one is informed of their tryout result is important and differs from the issue of 'being cut'. The fact that participants could also tease apart the separate issues (being cut versus how one is informed of this fate) was crucial in being able to discuss the topic meaningfully.

Specific themes around the different methods of communication will be discussed at length in future sections, including concerns and consequences surrounding various methods, however it is worthy to note at this time that participants did note that specific communication method aside, the way in which youth are informed of their tryout result can impact the youth in significant ways. When asked rather directly: Does the method used to deliver team selection decisions matter? Mary, a parent, replied "Absolutely it does. You can't get away from that" (p. 13). Julia, another parent, was more specific in her answer and supposed that there are lasting consequences to the manner in which youth are dealt with. "What they learn at that point, they take into adulthood and into their working lives. So if they grow into a position where they are supervising others as adults, what they learn back then has consequences on how they treat colleagues or employees or staff" (p. 13).

Rick, a coach, has thought critically regarding his decisions about how he informs youth of tryout decisions and contended:

> The consequences of doing it the wrong way can be devastating. It can be. They could drop out of the sport, they could take it personally; lose their self-esteem which can manifest itself in many other complications in life. There's all kinds of things that could trigger young people to not feel good about themselves. There are then all kinds of consequences of that. The bottom line is that I wouldn't care

> if I never won a game – but I certainly would care if I was responsible for setting a young person in a path where they self-destruct because I made them feel so bad about themselves. If I didn't take this seriously, I wouldn't coach (p. 10).

Later sections of this chapter will explore some of the themes brought up here by Rick, yet at this point I want simply to illustrate that there is a shared appreciation for the difficulty in the task of telling someone they are cut, and that the manner in which this news is delivered has consequences.

An Inventory of Communication Methods

In presenting this list I am in no way implying that these are the only ways of informing youth of their tryout results. I have learned that there are many more communication methods than I would have originally imagined, and this list has been generated by speaking with the participants. This list is surely incomplete, yet does offer a worthwhile illustration of many options available to coaches. Some of the methods will be quite familiar to those immersed in competitive sport, and some methods have variations which have not been detailed here. The methods most commonly discussed by my participants will be explored in this project as they relate to the themes and sub-themes.

Possible methods of delivering tryout results that were presented in this research:

- Phone calls with each athlete who tries out
    - With parent involvement
    - Without parent involvement

- Phone calls only to those who 'make the team' (omission of call indicates that one did not make the team)
- Phone call to parents of each athlete who tries out
- Face-to-face conversation at sport facility between coach(s) and each athlete who tries out
    - With parent involvement
    - Without parent involvement
- Conversations with each athlete individually (off to the side) – not as formal nor private as face-to-face meetings
- Letters sent home with each person who tried out
- Letters and report cards sent home with each athlete who tries out
- List of those who made it:
    - posted in school hallway
    - posted at sport facility
    - posted in local newspaper
    - posted on sport club or association website
    - sent via email to each athlete who tries out
- List of those who *didn't* make it posted in hallway
- Chosen athletes' names read out in front of group of all those trying out
- E-mail sent to each athlete with their personal result

Research Themes

Rather than discussing each method of communicating tryout results one after the other, the themes of the research will be presented along with their sub-themes. It is clear that certain themes apply for more than one communication method, and so the specific methods of communication will be explored as they were discussed relative to the themes. This seems consistent with this type of research where the purpose is not to pit certain methods against each other in an attempt to endorse one method over others. Rather, the interconnected themes transcend the specific communication methods and this presentation allows readers to consider the issues for themselves and encourages them to make sense of the information in a way that allows them to make their own conclusions about the issue. The themes that will be discussed are: feedback, role of parents, why coaches do what they do, individuality, and take-home messages.

Feedback

The question of feedback was by and large the most discussed theme during participant interviews. Sub-themes under feedback include: deservedness, assumptions deriving from a lack of feedback, asking for more, genuineness and honesty, child-friendliness, coach expertise, assumptions leading to the lack of feedback, motivation and learning, and finding alternative opportunities.

Deserving to Know 'Why'

Every participant commented on if and how youth, after facing an unsuccessful tryout situation, should receive an answer to their question: 'Why didn't I make the

team'. Overwhelmingly these participants said that not only *should* athletes receive this information, but rather that they *deserve* to receive it. Leigh, a coach, said "Certainly the kids deserve to hear what they did right and what they need to work on" (p. 9). The problem arises when certain communication methods do not lend themselves well to offering this kind of feedback. Several athlete participants noted that when learning they were cut by seeing a posted list of names, they knew only that they were not good enough and had no other feedback about their performance or effort during the tryout process. Coach Leigh spoke to this problem directly by noting:

> They deserve more than just a list on the wall. If you just put a list you don't know why you didn't make it. And I think if you can give that feedback then they have something to work on. I think any athlete deserves to know why they did or didn't make it (p. 8).

A parent made a similar remark, "[Coaches] should be prepared to give a constructive reason why the child was cut" (Adrienne p. 8).

The athletes agreed with this as exemplified by Sarah's comments, "I hate it when they don't offer any feedback" (p. 9) and "It's very frustrating when you don't know why you are cut" (p. 4). Another athlete recognized the importance of knowing why one does not make the cut and speaks to deservedness when saying "They [coaches] should almost have to explain why they cut you. You know, 'we feel at this time you're not on the team because …'[pause], you should actually have to go down and say, 'okay, you need to work on this, this, and this and you'll be back here next year'" (Brett, p. 5). He later added "At least then I know what to work on. Instead they just leave you out in the cold and you're like, why didn't I make it?" (Brett, p. 6).

Several coaches also noted their perspective on offering feedback that informs the athlete about the reasons why they were unsuccessful at the tryout. Dave even said "If you can't accept the responsibility as a coach to provide feedback, then you shouldn't be coaching" (p. 12). He elaborated on this and alluded to another theme; that of logistics which will be discussed later on, when he said "You still have to have that feedback, of course. And a coach should provide that feedback. You would think that it would be within their scope of responsibility to provide the feedback, even if they had 20 to 30 players" (p. 23). Again, I will later discuss logistical constraints, yet it is important to note that certain methods of communicating tryout results do allow for the successful dissemination of answers to athlete questions.

Sarah, an athlete, noted "I prefer the one-on-one method because then you can get some feedback about how it went, and they can say 'this is why you got cut'" (p. 3). Of note, the one-on-one method was sometimes referred to as face-to-face meetings or interviews, and in this report will be usually referred to as face-to-face meetings because, more often than not, I learned that for many athletes it is not *one*-on-one but rather *several* coaches speaking with one athlete. A parent commented on her expectation for feedback and how it allows the situation to become somewhat positive. She said:

> As a parent – you want it to be a positive thing. You want your child to still be able to feel good about it, and see the positive in it. So in order to see the positive in it, there has to be something positive offered…. if there is communication when the cut comes the child can pull something positive out of that" (Mary, p. 8).

A more complete discussion about how feedback can lend itself towards positive outcomes such as motivation and learning will follow in a later part of the report; nevertheless this mother, like most of the participants, thinks that the provision of feedback to athletes who are released should be commonplace in youth sports.

A Lack of Feedback Can Lead to Wild Assumptions

Most participants discussed the problem that when no feedback is provided to youth upon learning that they were unsuccessful in making the competitive sport program, there is often the tendency to speculate as to the reasons why they were unsuccessful. When no feedback verbal or otherwise, is provided "you don't know why you got cut, it could be a number of reasons. That's a problem" (Meg, p. 7). More unfortunately, is that sometimes the reasons that are assumed by youth are far from the truth, yet since they did not receive the answers to their questions, they are left with little else. Mary, a parent, stated, "When we aren't given that kind of communication – we fill in our own blanks" (p. 8). In Will's experience as a coach when many players are cut and they find out via posted lists "You get some real doozies coming after you: all kinds of conspiracy theories as to why they didn't make it" (p. 2).

Participants were forthcoming in offering specific examples and athlete Sarah noted, "I didn't know why I was cut. I guessed that it could be because I was a girl and maybe they didn't want girls on their team" (p. 3). After many years of coaching, Alyson expressed that she had heard many assumed reasons for being let go. In asking her to provide some examples she said "Absolutely, like 'I'm black', 'I have red hair', 'I'm too fat', 'I'm too skinny', 'she's the president's daughter', or 'the coach just likes them

better'" (p. 6). An athlete who was cut without feedback speculated that another student who he perceived to be a weaker player, and who was injured, made the team because "his father had connections in the basketball scene" in their city (John, p. 9). There were further similar examples like that from Brett, another athlete, who said "One kid was telling me he got cut because another player's dad was an equipment manager and he could get all these deals. That's why he got cut from the team, he feels" (p. 16). A parent, Heather, added "There was a little history with some other players that always made it because their dads coached. That's a whole other thing too when you think about cutting kids, right; a lot of personal agendas, etc." (p. 2).

It's impossible to gauge the potential truth in these speculations because answers were not provided by the coaches. That is, perhaps there are cases where youth are cut for some of the reasons noted above. As a sport community we should hope that discrimination of this kind is not the standard procedure, yet when youth are cut and they do not know why, who is to blame when the air is filled with unsubstantiated and often self-protective claims like those noted here? It seems as though a lack of straightforwardness fuels speculation from athletes, parents, and other coaches alike. In addition to the damage speculation and gossip can cause to youth sport, we must return to the considerations of the individual athletes who simply want answers to valid questions.

John, upon learning that he did not make it on to the next portion of a tryout process by reading his name on a list of those being eliminated said "I didn't know why I got cut really. It just said your name and that you're not going to make the team, and I was flabbergasted" (p. 3/4). Sarah's frustration was as a result of not knowing where to

improve in order to increase her chances of success in later tryouts within the sport. She recalled:

> He never said, 'this is what you can improve on'. How am I supposed to get better if I don't know what I am doing wrong? Maybe I got cut because of my shot or maybe something else? If it's something I can work on and then I can improve for next year I want to know what it is so that I can be a better athlete (Sarah, p. 3).

In the absence of feedback, youth are left to guess as to why they were not good enough to make the sport program for which they were trying out. Sometimes the reasons they assume to be true might be quite far from the truth and may lead to gossip and destructive tarnishing of a sports club or coach. In addition to this, athletes who wish to improve upon their unsuccessful tryout performance are required to guess which skills deserve more practice over others. Filling in one's own blanks is thus potentially complicated and harmful.

Asking for (More) Feedback

When youth learn that they were unsuccessful in making a sport program and learned so by noting their exclusion on a list or by any similar manner where feedback and reasons for their elimination were not provided some might counter: well they should simply ask the coach themselves for the answers to their questions. In speaking with the participants of this study, I learned that while for some this might be the natural course of action, for others it is not. Mary, a sports mom, made a great point in noting "If they've only been cut once and it was through a posted list – it might not have occurred to them

that they could go ask the coach for more information" (p.12). For John who was cut from his school basketball team, seeking out the coach and asking for feedback on his own initiative was not realistic for him, "Honestly, I didn't ask him because being in Grade 9, I was still intimidated. I did not go ask the coach why. I was so distraught" (p. 4). In another situation where the coach posted a list but then verbally encouraged the athletes to approach him with their questions, the context was different for John. "He actually said 'you guys can talk to me and I will tell you exactly why you got cut'" (p. 8). John noted however that another reason he decided to approach the coach on this later occasion was because his best friend who was also cut decided to talk to coach: "He was like me, basketball was one of his big things, so he went to the coach and of course hearing that my buddy went, well, now I'm going to go too right? So this time I went by myself to talk to the coach" (p. 8). The action of asking the coach for answers to his questions was such a big deal to John he remembers it vividly, "It's one of the key moments in my life. It was third period, at about 11:00am, I went there and asked the coach 'Why did I get cut when I did so well in junior ball and I had made major steps to improve?'" (p. 8). In this case, when John was younger it was the actual invitation to ask for more feedback and the fact that his friend went too that made the difference for him.

Although Sarah, an athlete, notes that she was the type of teenager who would have asked the coach for more information if she was not given any explanation for being eliminated, she empathized with those uncomfortable doing so. She said:

> I think some people might be too afraid to go and see a coach about feedback. So I could see people who, even though they want feedback, they wouldn't go ask because they would be too nervous. I think they might be afraid that it isn't going

to be constructive. If all the coach said was 'you're bad at this, you're bad at this, you're bad at this, and so that is why you didn't make the team', then I'd be like why bother going for this kind of feedback…It's further deflating" (p. 15/16). Mary's story is similar as she notes how her two children would have opposite reactions. In the case of Mary's son, a list was posted with no indications that the coach welcomed further questions or was able to give more feedback. Her son was so sure that he would make the team that he approached the coach for answers thinking that the omission of his name on the list was a typographical error. She was quick to note however, that not all children would be so eager to pay a visit to a coach who had just released them: "He just did that on his own. It was absolutely his idea to go to see the coach. My other son would have had the total reverse reaction to it – he never would have gone to see the coach" (Mary, p.1). She later added, "If the coach would have offered to the boys to come and talk to him he would never have approached him in that kind of situation – that's just not his personality" (Mary, p. 5). The experiences of these youth indicate that many youth, even those youth eager to participate in sports, cannot or perhaps should not be expected to take the initiative and ask for more feedback without being encouraged to do so by their coach or by others.

It is important to note however that many coaches do seem available and willing to answer follow-up questions. Alyson, a coach who provides a great deal of feedback to each youth unsuccessful in making one of her skating teams, noted that "If they call me back I will give them more feedback" (p. 6). Meg who was eliminated in a situation where she learned about her elimination by noting the absence of her name on the posted list was firm when she stated "I would make it very clear that if they have any questions about the tryouts or process

that the door wasn't shut, they could come and talk later if they wanted to" (p. 11). In Adrienne's daughter's case, feedback was not offered to the athletes when they were released from the tryout, but she noted "Unless they [the youth who were cut] came to a coach specifically and said 'what can I work on?', they would tell them then" (p. 2). If the situation is such that youth have scheduled opportunities to speak to the coach after a team list is posted, Adrienne commented that perhaps posting a list is not as bad as she previously thought. In such cases, the posting of the list is only part of the process. She suggested "You can deal with it and then go back and ask the coach 'Why? Can you tell me what I can work on?'" (p. 8). Not all however found meaning in discussing tryout results after the team had been named.

In Will's 15 years experience as a coach he noted that after posting a list "there's no valuable discussion after that point" (p. 4). He finds that when athletes do come to see him who have been cut "that they just want to trip you up, they want to ask you all sorts of questions and if you come back with an answer that they feel you're inconsistent with or it doesn't apply to other athletes and stuff like that, then they can go raise holy hell with whoever is above you – a principal, a president, something like that" (p. 4/5). Will also discussed how despite having player evaluation documentation he finds that sometimes the questions and questioning never seem to come to and end. He said, "having the documentation meant that I could feel very confident in my decision, but at the same time, you would think that by providing that stuff it would make the club house lawyers, and eventually his parents, go away, but it didn't" (p. 7). In addition to this he has also encountered situations where he believes that when emotions are running too high by athletes or their parents he finds that documentation cannot help. He explained, "in those cases it doesn't matter when you've got a thousand sheets of paper to back you

up or no sheets of paper to back you up" (Will, p. 8). Will notes that he has found that sometimes the reaction of his athletes depends upon their age. He compares the younger 12-13 year olds to those aged 15 and older when he noted "I'm pretty sure they're [the younger ones] just as hurt if they don't make the team, they're [the younger ones] less likely to look for the documentation or the conspiracy just because of their age" (p. 9).

Not within the scope of this research project, yet worth mentioning here for interest's sake is that Will suggests that the questioning nature of the youth he has run into may be a result of shifting values with time. He commented on kids: "they've been brought up to question things, to want to know why, and not to take things at face value and not to give people in a position of authority a free pass. So that's kind of made it really interesting for coaches and I don't know if there's any easy solution out of that" (p. 19). He added:

> To be honest with you I think it's not necessarily a bad thing to allow kids to question things, but at the end of the day, it's very wearing on coaches because what they're doing is questioning the coach's integrity in that situation. And there are some coaches that do need to have their integrity questioned, but the vast majority of them don't, and it's tough on us (Will, p. 19).

Will refers to potential conflict and confrontations and this will be discussed later on when examining the question of why coaches select their tryout communication methods, however the conflict between wanting feedback and coaches providing avenues for this to occur also exists.

Although every coach in this research project noted that they would accept questions (either follow-up questions to initial feedback, or preliminary questions when

no former feedback was offered), there exist many cases where this proves to be very difficult due to barriers put up by coaches themselves or by their sport administrators. Parent Adrienne noted that if posted lists were going to be used, youth must have the option of asking for more information: "If the kid wants to ask why, they should be able to have an answer… The coaches should be prepared to answer questions" (p. 6). Despite this, coach Will explains how, when perceived from a different perspective, perhaps coaches do not always have to answer to athletes and families seeking additional information. In his administrative position Will discusses what he sees as a double edged sword. On one hand following tryouts where youth learn their results via a posted list he would like to offer the opportunity for follow-up feedback by providing contact information for the various coaches and noted that some coaches are "more than happy to take those phone calls" (p.18). He explained that sometimes they are able to post contact information like email addresses or phone numbers so that families can make follow-up contact. However, on the flip side he notes that too often than not "it's very difficult to get coaches" to volunteer in key coaching positions and he notes that if the association does not treat their coaches in certain ways, they are likely to find themselves in a situation where they are short of qualified coaches (p. 18). He indicated that "we try to protect our coaches", and so sometimes this means preventing youth and families from calling coaches about tryout results by restricting access to coach contact information (Will, p. 18).

It seems to me that the question of asking for feedback, whether it is *more* feedback or any feedback at all, is more complicated than some might assume. Instead of presuming that youth will ask for answers if they want them, some might reconsider other

variables such as the role of the coach in inviting feedback and on the other hand, the coaches' availability and interest to do so. To uncover another level, I will now look at the problem many have with the quality of feedback offered.

Is that Feedback Genuine and Honest?

In more than a few instances participants noted that the content of the feedback they did receive seemed rehearsed, and was often lacking genuineness. Sarah, an athlete having been through quite a few tryouts remembers these types of end-of-tryout speeches: "He said something lame about if we didn't make it he was sorry and we should try again next year. It was pretty brutal" (p. 3). She also recalled an experience where "All he said was 'thanks for coming, the list will be out tomorrow blah, blah, blah'" (p. 6). Others seem to have reduced certain parts of the speech to 'blah, blah, blah', perhaps because they found it lacked any substance or seemed scripted, as Heather offered a very similar comment when asked what the coaches said in her son's experience, "'Thanks for coming out, blah-blah-blah', you know the typical avoid confrontations speech" (p. 1).

Brett, another athlete, also complained about the lack of content in the so-called feedback he received upon being eliminated from a hockey team:

> He basically gave me the same speech that every coach gives you. 'You're just about there; maybe next year; keep developing your skills; if we have a good season we might still call you up'. That's probably the line most coaches use: 'we might still call you up'. It's a polite way of saying you're *not* on the team (p. 4).

Sarah also commented on statements from coaches that seem so obvious that they are not worth saying. She noted how "every coach always says 'a lot of you are good but I can only take so many', which I think is stupid. I roll my eyes every time they say that" (p.11). I think athletes like Sarah and Brett are looking for something more personal and more thoughtful from a coach who has eliminated them from a sport program.

Leigh, a coach, notes that sometimes it can be difficult to offer each athlete personalized feedback especially when there are a great number of youth trying out for limited positions. She notes that it's easy for coaches to quickly dismiss the weakest players in order to focus their attention on 'bubble players'; those who are close together in skill and are close to making the team. She said however, that each youth should receive something specific about their tryout performance even if it is general and similar to feedback offered to other players. She said:

> I think you have to be absolutely honest. You have to give them reasons– it's easy, you can say you need to work on your speed, you need to work on your ball juggling or your ball skills, you need to talk more, you're just too quiet, you need to be more of a team player, whatever it is. You also need to recognize their talents. Everybody's got strengths, even if it's really good and hard effort. I think you always need to find something good to give them (p. 11).

Adrienne, a parent, spoke to the same point and firmly believes that logistical concerns such as the amount of time to communicate with each athlete in cases where many athletes do not make the team should not keep coaches from offering each child some sort of feedback. She elaborated:

> Yeah, but even the bottom ones you could say 'Your skills aren't up to the level that I'm looking for. Work on your passing, work on your: whatever it is'. They've watched them pass, they've watched them hit, so they should be able to – I mean, even if it's such a general thing that you tell sixteen people the same thing, it's *true*, and it does give every one of them something to work on. It's not a logistical nightmare. Those who were closer to making the team need more specific feedback to fine-tune their skills. But everyone should get at least something (p. 9).

From these perspectives, personal feedback can include fairly general feedback so long as it's honest and applicable to the individual athlete.

The question of receiving honest feedback does however become ever more complicated when we consider the issues discussed by several participants about the difficulty of offering truthful reasons for eliminating youth. More specifically, questions concerning providing honest feedback about factors beyond the athlete's control were considered. Adrienne's daughter was cut from a provincial level volleyball team and was told that it was due only to her size:

> The coach at the end of it told her that her skills were equal to this other girl. There were two girls that were trying for the one position, and they told her that she did everything the same, they were all equal in all their skills, but Jacqui was shorter. So that was why she was cut (Adrienne p. 2).

She didn't find this to be useful feedback for her daughter and said:

> I think it's easier to take if they give you something constructive to work on, you know, then you can say well, these people are more developed in this area, or their hitting or

their defence. It's easier for the girls to take that because there's something you can work on (Adrienne p. 3).

She added, "It was not constructive. I mean, even if they would have picked something that she could have worked on, she would have come away feeling a little better, because 'I can work on it, I might have a chance next year'"(p. 3). Since the only feedback Jacqui received about her tryout was about her height she had no understanding of what to do in order to be successful in future tryouts.

Jacqui did not know what the coaches intended for her with respect to whether they thought she should return next year if she was taller, or if they thought she was otherwise a strong player. She simply did not know what they thought of her, nor what they thought she should do with her volleyball career. Because the only information they had received was about her size "we're just guessing what they mean by that" (Adrienne, p. 11). Her mom commented on Jacqui's attitude, "If she wouldn't have been as determined of a kid, she would have just given up there" (Adrienne, p. 3). It is clear that Jacqui's resilience and commitment to her sport enabled her to get past this experience where she was left guessing about her skills and future directions, however some might contend that coaches ought to find and provide more rationale to an elimination aside from body size.

When Mary's son was cut from a provincial level volley-ball team because of his size, she thought a potentially devastating outcome was avoided because of the manner in which one of the coaches handled it. "He really handled it well. This coach was great" (Mary, p. 3). Not only was her son later invited to practice with the selected athletes, but the fact that the coach approached her son and validated his skill and effort went a long

way in smoothing the potentially contentious situation. The coach commented on more than her son's size, and this meant a great deal to Mary and to her son.

Leigh, a soccer coach, also agrees that coaches need to speak to issues aside from size when making cuts, even if the athlete's size has much to do with the reason for being eliminated. She said, "I'd give them more than that. It's never *just* because you're short" (p. 12). Leigh elaborated:

> Sport is our bodies, you know. It's how athletic you are, how strong you are, how fast you are, how tall you are in some sports. I don't think it's wrong to include it. I wouldn't make it the only thing, and I would ensure to educate them about ways to learn to compensate for their disadvantaged size. There are always short kids, small kids, but they can learn to be exceptional in other ways (p. 13).

For many of these participants, it then seems as though speaking honestly about body size can be relevant, however many would request that coaches comment specifically upon *how* their body size impacts various skills within the sport and what they could do to compensate for this in the future.

Another reason for being eliminated that was discussed that is also beyond the athlete's control is that of their parents' behaviour. Coaches have told me that they have either considered, will consider, or have actually eliminated athletes due solely or mostly to unruly behaviour by an athlete's parents. While this seems quite unfortunate for the youth involved, it does not seem that unrealistic for a coach, oftentimes a volunteer, with or without years of experience or training, who, when considering two otherwise equally deserving athletes might look unfavourably upon the youth whose parents are known to give coaches headaches. Addressing this problem is certainly beyond the scope of this

research, although the message a youth might receive upon elimination for this reason is certainly pertinent. Soccer coach Leigh offered her perspective:

> I personally wouldn't tell the kid anything against his or her parent. I would not want my kid to be told they didn't make it because of me because what can they do about it? Now, as a coach would I tell a parent that I want your kid but there's too much baggage and you're the problem? Maybe. I would perhaps take the kid and set out my conditions for the parent, but I don't think you need to tell the kid a parent issue (p. 12)

Parents must consider the impact they could have in team elimination decisions, yet coaches certainly have to consider how or if parent behaviour will impact team tryout decisions and how information about parent behaviour will be communicated to families.

The final consideration under the issue of honest feedback is that of position of play. Some coaches mentioned that sometimes youth might be eliminated only because of their position on the field, ice, or court. Coach Rick feels that athletes need to hear this information honestly and he noted that in his tryouts "We said 'listen somewhere along the line we're going to end up cutting some of you and it's not because you're poor players it's just because there's a certain things that we're looking for, and it actually can come down to left and right handed shots" (p. 5). While Rick thinks it's important to inform the athlete honestly about the final reason for their elimination (too many right handed players, for example), he was quick to note that he always provides players with detailed information about their personal skills and effort. So while an athlete might be eliminated because there are already enough sweepers on the soccer team, guards on the basketball team, or goalies on the hockey team, Rick thinks that it would be important to

let the athlete being eliminated know which skills they need to improve upon in order to be competitive within that specific team position at a future tryout.

Another coach, Dave, summarizes honesty in feedback in noting "From my experiences, they take it relatively well [being eliminated], as long as you give them the proper feedback. They have to know why. You need to give them a real honest reason why" (p. 6). Meg recalled an experience when she did not make a soccer team and expressed how she was truly grateful of the fact that the coach took the time to let her know that her efforts were appreciated. She noted that the coach praised her desire to try out for an established elite team and the coach "was smiling and said that I was really brave to come try out and that she admired that, and she said good luck in the future. That kind of thing. So it was still quite positive, and it wasn't false at all" (Meg, p.10).

After considering the issues surrounding honesty in feedback, some might say that it is easy to offer genuine and honest feedback, but others might say that it is easier said than done. It is up to coaches to bear in mind that although players *are* actually cut because there are only a limited number of spots, and that this is an *honest* reason why many players were not selected, youth might be unsatisfied with this reason. Further, I have learned that athletes might be eliminated because of their size, their parents' actions, or their position of play – however, it is important for coaches to ask: why else am I eliminating this athlete, and what is appropriate to tell youth under these circumstances? Are there other genuine and honest reasons that coaches could share with athletes in order to satiate their question of 'why didn't I make it'?

Is it Child-Friendly?

Several participants noted how the manner in which youth can be informed of their non-selection to a sport program can lack child-friendliness. Coach Rick's remark serves as a good reminder for those working with this age group, "You're not making cuts for the Toronto Maple Leafs...you're making cuts for a group of kids who are 12-14 years old in a sport where they are not professionals" (p. 10). Despite this, it seems as though many of my participants have experienced team eliminations that rival the formality and sternness of team eliminations faced by adult professionals. This was seen as a problem by many and Brett noted how coaches might lose sense of children's ages when they are involved in high level competitive youth sport. He recalled experiences where "the coaches are so serious that they forget that you're a kid; they think you're a grown man and if you're thirteen, twelve, they think kids have no emotions. He [the coach] almost reminded me of Donald Trump" (p. 9). It was fascinating how many people associated team elimination experiences to the reality television show The Apprentice where the harsh and unyielding Mr. Trump eliminates individuals one after the other each week by simply saying 'You're fired!'.

Coach Dave noted how face-to-face meetings between the coaching staff and a young player might make the young athlete feel like an employee awaiting his doom in the boardroom. He is aware that face-to-face meetings can be quite intimidating for young athletes especially when more than a couple of adults sit on the opposing side of the table. "It's usually the director, coaches and the assistant coaches. It is quite intimidating for a 13 year old, or 14 year old, explaining to them their fate and goals for that year. They're kind of on the hot seat. It is tough for them, very tough" (Dave, p. 6).

A parent, Julia, echoes the situation faced by her son where "the coaches would call the boys in one at a time into the dressing room and there would be a number of coaches, but basically there would be anywhere from 2 to 4 men who would speak to the one child" (p. 1). Gauging 'child-friendliness' is certainly a matter of opinion and not everyone found the aforementioned situation inappropriate for children.

Parent Julia thought that her son was mature enough to face a coaching panel in a room all by himself and chalked it up to a learning experience his son could benefit from:

> I'm sure it's a bit scary for them, but they are old enough to go through something like that. I felt it was appropriate. I think he did too; he knew that was the way it was. It's got to be uncomfortable when you are standing there waiting for the axe to fall or not – but that's the process and it's a life skill to learn… That is how you go through job interviews. Welcome to the real world (Julia, p. 4).

So while this mom found the experience to be appropriate for her son, others said that while a face-to-face elimination can be an experience that they later draw from when heading into job interviews, they wanted coaches to remember that children aged 13 and 14 are not always heading into job interviews just yet. Furthermore, some questioned the similarity between job interviews and situations involving actual elimination. In addition to the differing perspectives on the appropriateness of the face-to-face method of communication, there are other methods of communication that others find to be less intimidating for the youth involved.

When asked how she tries to ensure that her elimination encounters are child-friendly, coach Alyson tries to put herself in the position of the skater being released from the team as opposed to thinking like the coach who has a job to do [cutting x number of

kids]. She asks herself "well first of all, what would I want to hear if it were me? I'd be saying 'okay I need some information to know why, I need to have some positive feedback too, and I definitely need to know that I'm not a total failure'" (Alyson, p. 4). More specifically she explained:

> I have to put myself in their shoes. I need to remind myself of their age. What are they going to feel? If course they are going to be absolutely crushed if they don't make the team… I am absolutely making sure I know how I would want to be treated at that age in that situation. We try to do it as nicely as possible, and especially because we are dealing with kids (p. 4).

In order to deliberately aim to make it as comfortable for the youth as possible Alyson offers positive feedback and tells them "all of the really good things about what they've done at tryouts, and where they have improved" (p. 4). She explained that "you give them options and you make them a part of the decision" in order to make the situation suitable for youth wanting to be active in sport (ibid). In speaking about this Alyson finished by saying:

> For me coaching is not just about medals and skating. For me coaching is about teaching these kids life skills and how to deal with disappointments, or challenges and how to get around them and how to make it into a positive experience (p. 4).

Luckily, there are other participants who find it possible to create child-friendly team elimination experiences.

When coach Leigh has to perform team selections and communicate those decisions to the youth involved she is "more concerned with making sure the kids are

okay with this, or as okay as they could be" (p. 10). In order to be most appropriate for the age of youth she works with she tries:

> To put it delicately. I think it's really important – there's no easy way but I always try to sandwich in the good stuff and get in 'that you didn't make the team, but we're glad you came out. We want you to come out again. This doesn't negate you for the rest of your life, and we don't want you to think that you shouldn't come back to this club and try again, because people change and teams change and you can do better and other kids may not rise to the occasion that we did select for the team'. That's usually how we did it" (Leigh p. 2).

Rick's approach is similar and he always "focuses on the positives of the person trying out" (p. 7). When discussing how he tries to make the situation appropriate for youth he explained how in addition to providing them with individual feedback, "you tell the girls 'hey, you put in a valiant effort … the coaching staff is extremely pleased with the effort that you put in during this whole training camp and believe me you improved a lot'" (Rick, p. 10). In addition to being sensitive of their age, Rick makes further considerations for girls that he coaches at this age.

Rick is concerned that an unfriendly or inappropriate release from a competitive sport program could have harmful effects for children, but especially for girls. He said that when he informs the girls of their non-selection:

> There's probably still going to be a couple of tears but at least they go away with some self esteem, some dignity, knowing that they made a valiant effort, and that everyone's happy with them. And remember we're talking 12-14 year olds; a very vulnerable age, especially if you are female. That's what you are dealing with –

> young people who are vulnerable and they have a million other things to worry about and so the object wasn't to completely destroy their morale and stuff – the object was to say 'yes you didn't make the team", but send them away feeling good about themselves (p. 10).

Working with girls of this age has caused Rick to see value in ensuring self-esteem and motivation to continue in the sport even after being eliminated from a team. Issues of motivation and learning will be discussed more thoroughly in a later section, however its relatedness to child-appropriateness was pertinent for this participant. Differing and sometimes opposing perspectives are held when contemplating what kind of elimination methods are appropriate for youth, yet being cognisant of the age and maturity of the child, despite the level of sport competition, were important considerations for many. For many participants, the relationship between providing honest and genuine feedback in a manner that is child friendly depends largely on coach expertise.

Coach Expertise

According to Adrienne, a sport parent, coaches require expertise in order to know how to deliver undesirable news in a way that is child-friendly. Expertise can certainly be defined in several specific ways, yet in this section the term is inclusive of expertise in several facets of coaching such as communication, eloquence, athlete evaluation, compassion, and general people skills. Adrienne says what is important is "the way you tell it. That's a skill a coach should learn. You don't *have* to be cruel and mean" (p. 9). Heather, another parent speculates about why coaches provide minimal or no feedback:

> I think the reason coaches don't say too much to the kids is that they don't know what to say. How do you tell a kid you're just not good enough or do you make up something? That's stupid, because if you don't know what you're talking about, that's no good either" (p. 18).

She continued and added:

> Some of them are just brutal; they'll just go, 'No, you're out', and that's it. They don't know what else to say to them so they're just really blunt about it. I think they just don't know what to say to them. That's the problem" (Heather, p 19/20).

This problem is recognized by several participants, yet some also recognize the need for training.

When asked how coaches can make sure they are being child friendly and personal when having conversations with athletes being released Mary, a parent, thought "that would be great, but that is a high skill level for coaches to have – and many coaches have only played maybe up to the high-school level of the sport, and haven't had specific coaching training" (p. 9). She added:

> If you are wanting more out of coaches – you can't just expect it, or just say it – those are skills that have to be taught and developed. It's a big undertaking – a huge undertaking…We are talking about are some pretty good people skills and evaluation skills, and so again it comes down to more training for the coaches (ibid).

Mary recognizes that the flip side of demanding qualities from coaches is providing coaches with the opportunity to learn the desired skills.

Related to limited training is volunteerism and the shared sense that many coaches of many youth teams are comprised of unpaid volunteers. A parent, Heather, recalls her own sons' experiences in sports and said "I guess the hard part is a lot of these coaches are just dads that are coaching. They don't have the expertise to say or know what each kid needs" (p. 12). Another parent pointed out the lack of training shared by coaches involved with the 13-15 year old age group, "for the age-group you are looking at, most of the teams that the kids are playing on are like a community or school level, and I don't think you have a lot of expertise with these coaches" (Mary, p. 2). Teachers, who are volunteer coaches in school settings, were discussed as differences and similarities between the school and community settings were explored with regard to informing athletes of non-selection.

With respect to coach training and delivery of tryout results, several participants noted that more can be expected out of school coaches due to their pedagogical training and values. It was noted that when youth are cut from school teams, they are often informed via a posted list. The lack of feedback provided seemed especially inappropriate for some given that teachers should understand the value of feedback as a learning tool. Julia, a parent stated, "Basically as a teacher, they should be asking themselves 'well what does the child learn from that?'" (p. 9). Another parent said "I absolutely think the coach could schedule meeting times for the kids who don't make the team - it's a skill a teacher should have" (Mary, p. 5). Speaking also to the avoidance of providing feedback, a third parent considered, "I would think teachers would, in school sports, maybe would give a little more information just because teachers are very chatty – that's what they do. They talk more" (Heather, p. 18). These participants voiced a clear

expectation that professional teachers who volunteer as coaches should know and act in a way which demonstrates more expertise than does the typical community parent volunteer.

These sentiments demonstrate how some parents feel that coaches, and especially teacher coaches ought to be able to provide quality feedback to children facing elimination from a competitive sport team or program. The need for coach training dealing specifically with communicating unsuccessful tryout results was highlighted as participants voiced interest in coaches gaining expertise in areas such as compassion and communication.

No Feedback because you Already Know Where you Stand

Sometimes when feedback is not offered to youth following a tryout it may be because of assumptions regarding the youth's ability to recognize his or her own weaknesses. That is, some coaches might think that youth are able to compare their abilities to the others and thus understand why they were eliminated based on their own perceived shortcomings. When no feedback was provided and no invitations to discuss tryouts were offered, some athletes assume that coaches think: "It's like you can figure out where you strengths and weaknesses are, that type of thing" (John, p. 6). Perceptions and assumptions of one's own abilities as compared to others in tryout settings is certainly a topic deserving its own research project, however I will briefly discuss its relevance to feedback, or rather the rationalized lack of, following team elimination decisions.

Several participants agree that children in this age group, 13-15, are able to effectively recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, and that this may partially explain why some coaches feel it unnecessary to provide feedback to the non-selected athletes. Leigh, a soccer coach stated, "generally as they get older they kind of know where they are in the scope of the team and the weak ones, they kind of know what to expect. When that call comes, by the U16, they know" (p. 3). Mary, a parent, is of the same opinion and believes that when youth are realistic about their chances of making a team they are less likely to be hurt because "you know where you fall and so if you are cut and you are expecting it, it's not such a hard thing" (p. 3). She latter added "most kids know how good they are" (Mary, p. 6). Several participants however, offered a contradictory perspective.

Parent Julia does not think that children or youth at this age are necessarily going to be able to gauge their own abilities as compared to the others at the tryouts. She explained about her own son's intuition when he was cut from hockey, "I can remember asking him at the time: 'do you think you were going to get cut'. And I remember him saying 'No – I don't think so mom'" (Julia, p. 7). She elaborated to say "that is quite a skill to have that kind of insight into your own abilities and how you compare to someone else… some are more intuitive than others" (Julia, p. 7). She latter included "a lot of adults don't have a lot of insight either" (ibid). When this is the case, she thinks it's imperative that coaches provide feedback to the youth as they may have no idea why they did not make the team nor which enhanced skills they require in order to keep up with those who earned membership within the group. It is interesting that Julia brought up the

capacity of adults to perceive and contrast abilities, as the role of parents in measuring their own children was discussed in this research.

The role of parents within the communication of tryout results will be discussed thoroughly in a separate theme. However, when discussing the ability of youth to be able to measure their own abilities next to their peers, the perceptions of parents are also relevant. Coach Will finds that even if parents are present for tryouts, they may not be very accurate judges of their child's ability compared to the other young athletes and he finds that the children are also poor at gauging their chances especially if they make one great play. Will noted:

> A lot of times the kid will score a touchdown and it's just an act of God. He'll get a carry against a weak defence or he'll be the last person to touch a ball before it goes in and stuff like that. Those are the hard ones because their parents are in the stands and they think 'oh, he's made a touchdown, he's obviously going to make the team'. And the kid's thinking, 'wow, I scored a touchdown' – for sure I won't get cut" (p. 13).

It is unfortunate then that sometimes athletes and parents are not given the true story as to why the youth was unsuccessful at making the team. Some coaches may speculate that youth will be able to appreciate the differences between solid skills and lucky breaks. While not discussed here, assumptions might also be made about parents being able to help their child understand why they were eliminated in the face of no or limited feedback. Given parents' diverse range of understanding of the sports in which their children participate, this too may be a dangerous assumption.

Motivation and Learning

As so far as feedback is concerned, most participants spoke about the motivational and learning benefits feedback can provide. Dave notes the importance of feedback for athletes of this age. He explained how major changes can still happen within this age group and that coaches need to be concerned about keeping all athletes motivated in sport and physical activities. "Of course they are entering that stage of life when who knows what's going to happen during that puberty stage when they are going to start to grow and get bigger and get a little bit more mature" (Dave, p. 20). This coach was speaking mostly about the children's shifting abilities and strengths and was offering a warning that in eliminating youth without motivating them to continue within the sport, coaches would be diluting the future talent pool. While the interest to keep talented (or even to-be talented youth) is valid, so too are the efforts to maintain sport motivation in all youth, regardless of their current or potential abilities.

Athlete John was eliminated from a hockey team and learned of his tryout result by noting the absence of his name on a posted list. He was not offered any feedback about his abilities nor effort, and regarding this experience said "my self-confidence was totally gone. I was pretty hurt, pretty upset" (p. 4). He explained how he felt about not receiving any feedback:

> I think it's important for kids to get that information because first thing, you want to encourage them to stay in the sport and stay active. Cutting is a negative thing and if you're focusing on the negatives, you're going to have a negative opinion of the sport (John, p. 14).

He noted how he would have liked the coaches to be concerned with his motivation and said "I feel if you can focus on the positives, like if you say 'your really blew us away in these fields', you know, then the kids can say 'I'm not crap, I've got a little skill. I can do this'" (ibid). John even explained how when he becomes a coach performing team eliminations for youth he will be quite aware of ensuring the experience does not deter the athletes involved from future sport opportunities. He explained how his actions would differ from how he was dealt with:

> I'd have more of an encouraging attitude. I would have been: well you're good at this, etcetera. Encouraging, yet here's what you need to work on and encouraging them to stay in sport because I know so many kids who quit because of that. Because they're like – I don't know what I did wrong, so they just up and quit (John, p. 13).

Losing motivation to the point of quitting was considered by another athlete when he did not make a hockey team and he too was unsatisfied with the feedback, "It didn't motivate me at all. I think it pushed me back actually. It kind of got me upset and not wanting to play hockey. I think it demoralized me more than anything, made me not want to play hockey" (Brett, p. 5). When speaking about circumstances where no feedback whatsoever is offered, Brett thought this would be even worse than his experience where he was offered a little. He noted, "But if you don't tell the kids [the reasons for their non-selection], the kid's just going to get demoralized and want to quit, which is what a lot of kids do" (Brett, p.10). While some had experiences that discouraged their likelihood to persevere in youth sport, others did have elimination encounters that were motivational.

Meg, an athlete, summed up her thoughts quite clearly when noting that after an unsuccessful tryout athletes should know that their effort was appreciated "so that they walk away with a positive feeling, and they walk away with something that motivates them rather than does the opposite" (p. 7). Leigh, a coach, noted that she is extremely explicit in her desire to motivate the youth to continue to play soccer or any other sport that interests them. She said:

> Now kids have so many choices. I think that's important. I always emphasize that. When I give a little speech to the girls, I always say I just love to coach because I love watching girls play sport. I love watching you do what you do. And it truly excites me to see someone playing so well and hopefully having fun. I want them to understand why participating is so great (p. 15).

From the point of view of these participants, effort must be made by coaches to ensure that youth receive feedback that motivates them to continue enjoying active lifestyles.

In addition to trying to preserve athlete motivation during an elimination process, some participants spoke to the opportunity for learning which occurs only when feedback is presented and discussed with those facing elimination. Julia, a parent, stated, "to try out, and not make it and not even know why – what's the learning in that?" (p. 9). She later explained:

> It's a blow to the child's self esteem. So you have to make that a learning experience. The feedback is then most important. And as I mentioned risk taking; it's a life skill and so when children aren't given any feedback about a tryout where they were cut, they are learning not to stick their neck out. They are

> learning not to try something new or different because when I do, it was all negative (Julia, p. 10).

Meg, an athlete, said that should she become a coach who has to eliminate youth following a tryout she would "try to make it a positive learning experience, rather than a failure", and she would want coaches to "encourage the child to keep trying" (p. 9).

How to motivate rather than deflate a youth who has been unsuccessful in gaining membership within a sport program or team must be difficult based on the number of those expressing experiences lacking in such feedback. It not only relates to the previously mentioned skills and expertise desired in coaches to be personable, child-friendly and compassionate, yet the ability to motivate may require a paradigm shift when conducting team elimination processes. Sarah eloquently suggested:

> I would tell them what they did well and tell them how they can improve. I'd give pointers. It's not just what they did poorly and the child thinking they suck at a bunch of things, but instead it's about giving them tools to help their play. It's a different way of approaching it (p. 16/17).

The experiences of the participants suggest that it is possible for athletes to leave a team elimination situation still feeling motivated and encouraged within the sport. Yet, many coaches struggle to achieve this. The factors of motivation and potential for learning are two more considerations to make when offering feedback to youth upon non-successful sport tryouts.

Where Else Can I Play? What About Alternatives?

A final factor within the discussion of feedback is that of finding alternative sporting opportunities for those youth facing elimination on a given team or competitive program. That is, participants discussed the question of *who* is best able to provide suggestions for alternative teams or programs when a youth fails to earn membership within a certain group. There is an obvious over-lap between suggesting alternative programs and attempting to motivate the youth to continue to pursue their interests in the sport, however many participants saw a worthwhile distinction between a message of 'we hope you continue playing the sport of xyz' as compared to a situation where a youth actually receives a list or contact details for similar sport programs. In some cases when youth are trying out for a certain team there is an obvious 'back-up" choice; for example many times there are 'A' teams and 'B' teams, and those who are not chosen for the highest level are offered spots on the lower team(s). This 'trickle-down' phenomenon will be explored momentarily, however those cases when no obvious alternatives are present will be examined first.

In some situations youth fail to earn membership on a team, and that team is either the only team within the organization, or no lower level teams are offered, and they are not offered feedback about their tryout nor information about what else is available to them. About this, parent Julia said: "I guess they fall through the cracks – it should be something that is addressed" (p. 9). Mary, another parent said almost the same thing, "Coaches should actually be doing something with these kids so you don't leave them slipping through - that they follow up during a conversation at the end in order to make sure they can find another place to play if this is still what they want" (Mary, p. 10).

Unfortunately, falling through the cracks in the sense of being left without suggested alternatives happens quite often according to the experiences and perspectives of the participants who cited many examples where youth are eliminated and are left asking 'well, where should I go now?'. Many coach participants spoke about finding or suggesting alternative programs for eliminated athletes and yet the degree to which they facilitated the transition to other choices varied considerably.

At one end of the spectrum I spoke to synchronized skating coach Alyson who makes it a priority to find every single interested skater a place to fit within the sport. Using her years of experience, professional and personal contacts, she makes serious efforts to help any skater trying out with her team a suitable skating team. Sometimes the skaters who are unsuccessful in making their desired team are interested in skating with lower level teams in her club, or training with the team (without having a spot in the line), and sometimes they are found places on teams outside of her club. She explained that she asks herself:

> Is there some other way that I can offer them something so that they can stay involved with us? Or, can I give them enough information to take to their coach to work on things if they would like to skate with us in the next year. We offer just about anything to any of the skaters and even if the skater can't skate with us they are welcome to come train especially in the spring as a 'skater in training' and they get tons of feedback that way. Usually I can find a place for them somewhere. There are always opportunities –always. And if they don't like these options, would the skater like me to find them a place to skate at another club… It doesn't matter to me as long as I keep them involved (Alyson, p. 3/4).

What is more, is that if she cannot find an acceptable alternative that the skater agrees to within her own club:

> I find them another place at a different club where they could go. I'd make suggestions, call the coach and say I've got somebody who I just can't fit in. And it works out fine. Sometimes they'll come back to us, and sometimes they will stay where they are, but I always let them know 'that you skate where you're comfortable, where you have your friends, and don't worry about anything else' (Alyson, p. 7).

Alyson explains that because she is so passionate about her sport she wants skaters to understand their options in order to remain active and happy within the sport no matter where they skate and regardless of the level.

Meg, an athlete, made a similar comment when noting how she would direct players to other options should they fail to make the team she was coaching. When Meg considers what she would do as a coach she said "I would try to suggest a community team, because there is probably something. If they love volleyball, then they should be able to play, so I would try to find them a community league or something" (p. 10). Parent Marc suggested that "The responsibility of the coach should be to speak to kids personally and offer alternatives" (p. 2). Related to the point made in the preceding section dealing with motivation, Marc recounted a story where a player was eliminated from a 'Gold' soccer team, but was encouraged by the coach to play on the 'Silver' team. She did so for two years and then re-earned her position on the 'Gold' team and later won a soccer scholarship into the United States. He remarked how tragic it is when "youth are

turned off sport at such a young age making it unlikely to tryout again later on" and made the point that instead, youth need to be directed towards alternative options (Marc, p. 2).

Short of finding athletes another team by putting them in contact with other coaches or clubs, coaches can still make concerted efforts to give the youth alternate ideas to consider. Meg also noted that as a coach when faced with a youth quite weak at the sport at hand, she would help the child to recognize other strengths and would help them consider other physical activities where the youth would be more likely to find success. She said:

> They have to be good at something, so if they are really fast you could say 'I notice that you are really quick at moving the ball, have you ever tried soccer' or something like that. Give them something active to do. That is what they want (p. 11).

It may perhaps be difficult to steer youth in directions that differ from their true desire, yet those coaches who do so are clear in their intention to keep youth involved in sports.

The manner in which youth are informed of their tryout result is relevant as some participants noted how certain methods lend themselves toward being able to have conversations about alternative choices better than other methods. For Mary, a parent, when asked how she would communicate her tryout results if she were a coach she said:

> It would have to be one-on-one because in order for you to place them somewhere else and to do it properly you'd have to talk to them and say why; 'this is *why* you don't fit here and this is *why* I think you'd fit here or better there. You might have a couple of options –what would you like to do'? – that kind of thing. Using the one-on-one would be best (p. 10).

She contrasted this to another method she is familiar with: posting or reading a list of names. She said that in posting a list or reading aloud a list of names of those selected for a team "to me says 'these kids that I've named – I've got a plan for you', but the omission of your name means 'I don't know what is going to happen to you'" (Mary, p. 8). For Mary, a communication method which is conducive towards having discussions about alternative options for the youth facing immediate elimination is significant as she points to the problem when eliminated youth receive no direction.

Coaches who find themselves in contexts where obvious alternative teams within the same sport are prevalent benefit from being able to direct youth unsuccessful in making the top program downwards toward other teams. Coach Will noted that for some of the teams he is involved with there are immediate alternative teams available for those who do not make the highest level team. He said he can "send them down to the junior team… It's like cutting, but at least they have a place to land." (Will, p. 4). He expanded by noting:

> You could recommend that they go to team B or something like that, within close proximity to where they live. It's not the best situation for them, but they can keep playing. So even though some people do get disappointed, they get less disappointed than if you tell them they can't play at all (Will, p. 3).

Coach Dave noted that he makes an effort to encourage his hockey players to find alternative teams that best suit their age and skill level. He noted that due to age and eligibility requirements he will either recommend a lower level competitive team, or in some cases he will point players towards opposing teams in the same level in other districts. He added "We direct them to the other teams, then note that 'their coaches will

be calling you for an evaluation with them'" (Dave, p. 8). Dave recognized the differences between sports programs such as hockey where players can trickle down until they end up a team as compared to situations where there may not be such obvious alternatives:

> I think it would be harder because there's no other teams for them to play on, right? Whereas in hockey, there is. There's other teams they could play on. You're just releasing them to a different level, where in high school or in junior high, unless there's intramurals that they can still play recreational-wise, intramural-wise. That's a little bit harder (Dave, p. 23).

Even though in situations like the aforementioned hockey example where youth do have a place to filter down to find a spot, participants shared problems with this system too.

In trickle-down team elimination processes youth are likely to tryout for the best team they see possible for them, and then players are eliminated and sent to the lower ranked teams where they may be accepted or eliminated and sent further down until all the spots on competitive teams are filled. Supporting these competitive structures most commonly seen in the sport of hockey, are recreational, or house-league programs where the last players eliminated from the competitive side end up, in addition to those players who avoided the entire competitive tryout process in the first place. Even though the recreational programs accept all registrants, and thus it would seem like every single interested player would thus have a spot, problems can arise. It was explained to me that sometimes the timing between all the competitive levels are not always in synch with one another and some players might be left without a place to play. This would occur when lower ranking competitive teams finalize their rosters before players trickle down from

their elimination at higher levels. I learned that although tryouts within this system are supposed to follow one-another in a subsequent order from most to least competitive, there are times when coaches are eager to start their practices and might dismiss players arriving from the upper tryouts in favour of the players they have already selected. This forces talented players to play at levels sometimes quite lower than what is most appropriate. Heather, a long-time hockey mom explained, "It's a big problem with hockey. This age is when we start losing kids. A lot of kids; 13-15 years old: just quit hockey" (Heather, p. 4).

Leigh notes this problem in soccer too. Community 'select teams' are to be feeder teams to club teams and players who do not make club teams are supposed to have guaranteed places on their community select team. Competitive club coach Leigh explained how "politics got involved and it got ugly and these community select teams were being made before the club teams were being made and this was very hard on kids" (p. 6). The players had to accept spots on the community teams before knowing their result of the club team, and this is opposite to how it should work. There was also the possibility of having players left out of a team most suitable to their needs and abilities because of the non-congruency amongst soccer coaches in the community. When the different levels within the system do not work together "You feel like you're stealing kids, or we have to have our tryouts before they have their tryout and it's getting ridiculous. Everyone should work together so that all the kids can play where they best belong" (Leigh, p. 8). There are also clear problems when already selected athletes on lower level teams are replaced by players cut from higher level teams at later times. As a coach, Leigh is frustrated and noted how a system which should work in order to best

place children and youth within suitable teams does not due to the lack of cooperation by individual teams or coaches.

In the aforementioned examples of hockey and soccer it is often the league administrators who provide information about the process of tryouts for teams at various levels, and they may be the ones to offer feedback about options once youth face elimination at the higher levels. In cases outside of sport systems where multiple levels of teams are found and where spots are guaranteed on recreational teams as a 'back-up' if unsuccessful in making the top team(s), we must still address the question of finding alternatives. Experiences were discussed where coaches take it upon themselves to direct athletes in appropriate directions, yet there are many times when coaches see this as being outside of their responsibly as so far as their relationship with eliminated athletes is concerned. Parent Julia recalled how in her sons' experiences with school sports, they were never offered suggestions of alternative sport programs when they were eliminated from a team after tryouts. Thus in Julia's experience it is up to the parents to suggest and explore other options in light of the fact that the teacher coach did not have any discussions about alternatives with the child. She adds however "it would be best if this came from the coach" (Julia, p. 12). Julia noted that it is actually coaches who tend to know quite a bit more about available sport programs in the community; especially for the sport in which they coach. For her, and for Marc, another parent, it would make sense for coaches to be the ones to provide information and suggestions to youth wanting to participate in a sport once facing elimination from a coach. Whether or not coaches accept this responsibility, and the degree to which they facilitate participation for all who

seek involvement is clearly debatable, however it should remain as a consideration when taking into account issues surrounding feedback after tryouts.

Summary of Feedback

The provision of feedback following the elimination from a sport program is of utmost importance to many participants. The issue is mediated not only by the method chosen by the coach to communicate his or her team selections, but also by factors explored here such as assumptions, the desire for more, genuineness, child-friendliness, expertise, motivation, and the communication of alternative choices. The desire to deal with some or all of these considerations is up to the coach, yet these choices will likely have consequences on the communication method used to announce tryout results.

Role of Parents

The fact that I interviewed parents as part of this research illuminates my assumption that parents can and oftentimes do have a role in situations where their children are eliminated from youth competitive sports. Fortunately, many participants were eager to discuss the issues surrounding parents' involvement in the process of communicating tryout results. One mother noted "for 13-15 year olds – I just don't think that parents should be detaching themselves from the process" (Mary, p. 10). Another parent said "There is a role for parents if parents are willing to take it on and if coaches are prepared to deal with them" (Marc, p. 1). Sub themes within the discussion on parent roles include pre-tryout information, being informed of tryout result and reasons, and parent presence during the release interaction.

Pre-tryout Information

Most participants thought that a pre-tryout information meeting or handout is related to team selection delivery methods, and also noted that this is most often where parents become first involved with the tryout process. Parent Mary suggested "you've got to keep the parent informed and educated" and many of the research participants would agree (p. 6). Coach Leigh welcomes all families at the beginning of her soccer tryouts and explains how the process will work and answers questions from families. When outlining the process for tryouts "it was an education for the parents too, so that parents know what the coaching staff is looking for" (Rick, p. 1). Athlete Brett said that providing parents with information about the team, club, and sport is important and contended "I don't think parents understand sometimes what their kid is actually getting into" (Brett, p. 14). For some of the parents, pre-tryout information included gaining knowledge about what should happen to youth who are not selected for membership on the team(s).

Julia's son's hockey organization did a good job in informing the families about the tryout process. She recounted her experience:

> When you apply to play at the rep levels there is a meeting at the outset and they say if you are choosing to have your child tryout for this level of hockey these are the terms. They spell it out....And they say this is how this is going to go. Tryouts will start and we will have skills and we'll have this and that, and they say all this at the start. And they say if your child doesn't make one level he can drop down to the next – so it was spelled out in these beginning meetings (p. 2).

She has similar feedback about her family's experience with baseball where the league hosted a:

> Meeting for rep tryouts for baseball and it was at the community centre and the parents all go and the process is laid out for all the families. It was spelled out, and so you know as a parent what the different outcomes look like (Julia, p. 10).

Knowing what the alternatives were in advance was considered to be important information amongst many participants.

Parent Mary explained that even if the alternative options are not fully detailed at the pre-tryout meeting she finds it important that youth can at least know that there are other choices for them should they fail to make the team at hand. Mary feels as though pre-tryout meetings should also include an education about the development systems within the sport so that families have the knowledge to appreciate the different levels of participation available. She said:

> You have to be informed on what type of structure you're going into so that you can deal with it as a parent of your child, because you know that if they don't make the 'A' team you can deal with that with your child and explain the development scheme to them (p. 6)

She continued:

> Families should know in advance and understand the development plan, so that we can take away the shame in playing for the 'C' team for example. There is nothing wrong with being on the 'C' team because it's about getting out there and being active. And if you are the 'C' team – so what? We need to validate all levels of participation. You are out with your friends, not everyone can be the

> star on the A team and you're having fun and you are more likely to become a healthy middle-aged man or woman who plays on a pick-up hockey team or soft-ball team or whatever. I think an organization does have to let parents know what they are getting into and how all the levels fit together because we don't know how it works intuitively (p. 7).

Mary spoke quite passionately about this point and concluded by noting that following a pre-tryout meeting youth who are going to tryout for a team should be comforted by knowing that no matter what happens "'I can still do what I love and develop' – and so communicating how this will work is a huge part of cutting" (p. 7).

Clearly if follow-up conversations between coaches and each youth facing elimination occur, and different alternatives are discussed in order to determine the most appropriate match, the tie-back to any pre-tryout mention of alternatives is achieved. That is, these participants recognize the benefit of informing youth of their options prior to knowing the result of their tryout; however many participants would add that conversations following tryouts about the alternative options are equally important in motivating youth to continue within the sport.

Informed Of Tryout Result and Reason

Many participants discussed the role of parents in helping youth through unsuccessful tryouts. Heather, a sports mom said, "It's up to the parent to help the child through it. How we handle it is very important" (p. 9). In order to do so however, parents need to be aware of the circumstances. Julia, another sport mom, thinks it is important for parents to know that their child is involved in tryouts and believes that

parents should know the outcome of the tryout because "if you don't know these things how can you parent your child...Definitely the parents need to be aware" (Julia, p. 10). John, an athlete, shares this perspective and said "If the parents know they can at least handle it in a certain way based on how their kid is going to react" (John, p. 22). He also said that parents being aware of the tryouts and the result "would be beneficial because then the parents would have the ability to encourage and comfort" (John, p. 21). Another athlete, Meg, explained that when she becomes a parent she "would probably want to know if they got cut and why" (p. 9). Lastly, coach Alyson expressed her thoughts about the role of parents while taking on the parents' perspective:

> I'm thinking, number one, if my kid didn't make a team, would I want to know why? Absolutely I would want to know why. I wouldn't challenge the coach's decision, but I would just need to know how do I help my child to the next level, or how do I get her into a position where she is ready. And without knowing what is going on I wouldn't be able to be supportive of my daughter. You know – that is what they need as a kid (p. 4).

There is a shared belief that parents are important in helping youth deal with the news of being eliminated, yet it is understood that they are only able to do so when they are cognisant of the tryouts and the ensuing results.

There is not as much consensus amongst the participants when considering how parents ought to become aware of the tryouts and the result. Obviously, in situations where parents are invited to pre-season meetings such as those explained in the aforementioned section, parents are involved and aware of the tryout process. There are other circumstances when meetings are not held, and due to this and other lapses in

communication, parents are left out of the process. Parent Mary senses that there is a communication breakdown when it comes to school sports. She understands that it is usually the child's responsibility to communicate to the parents about school sports and their associated tryouts. She notes however that if parents do not know that their child is trying out for a sport at school they are unable to offer support, and noted an experience with her son where "I actually didn't hear about it until a week after he had been cut. He couldn't even tell me" (Mary, p. 4). Had she not become aware of the situation in time "he would have totally given up" (Mary, p. 5). Instead, after facing elimination from the Senior team, she convinced him to stick with the Junior team instead, and encouraged him to try out for a club level team so that he was playing with youth who best matched his ability. He ended up playing at the Provincial, University, and National level in the very sport he was ready to drop because of a cut at school at the age of 15. The problem for Mary was that she was not aware of the tryout nor the result until it was almost too late.

Julia, another sports mom, discussed a similar experience with school sports and thinks that there is often a lack of communication between parents and teacher coaches. She explained:

> My experience with school sport is very different from community sports. The child just comes home and says – 'I'm trying out for volleyball and tryouts are Tuesday and Thursday next week'. So the parent asks – 'Oh so you like volleyball'? 'Yes'. 'And you are going to tryout for volleyball'? 'Yes'. 'Okay – well good luck'. And that's the extent of school sports. Communication was only ever through my son (Julia, p. 10).

She added that coaches might attempt to communicate via handouts but that this may have little success:

> Well I assume what happens is that coaches would give a handout on this once the team is chosen and it ends up in a backpack and unless you are a parent who hunts through the backpacks or have a child who is very forthcoming and shows you all the notices – you probably wouldn't find out. That is my experience (Julia, p.11).

The scope and dynamic of the relationship between parents and teacher coaches was discussed by other participants and although teacher coaches will be touched upon in another section of this chapter, their link to parental roles here is pertinent and warrants further discussion.

Meg, an athlete, suggests that teacher coaches can better facilitate information about school tryouts and suggested "A letter home would be nice. Just a short note. It would be kind of nice for the parents to know why their kid got cut" (p. 8). Brett, another athlete also suggested that teacher coaches could play a larger role than what he is used to and said:

> I would think the coach should maybe call the parents and say, you know, 'I already talked to your son or daughter, they didn't make it, I wish them all the best, hope we can have them on the team next year, I hope he's doing well'. That way when the child comes home all crying the parent know why. Some kids don't talk to their parents. That's a very troublesome age for kids. I think that's why it's a good thing for the coach to call the parents (p. 11/12).

Others think that perhaps it should be the parents and not the teacher coach who should initiate dialogue about tryouts and results. Parent Julia stated:

> I don't think the coach should have to phone each family. I think that as a parent you have to be the one. If you have some questions – then you have to be the one to call. I don't know how much onus should be on the coach (p. 11).

Thus, some participants feel that coaches within school sports should provide information to parents about their children's tryout and subsequent elimination, whereas others believe it is the parents' responsibility to become informed and ask their questions from there.

Dave, a community hockey coach, makes himself available for parent phone calls after communicating his team selections and appreciates the need for parents to ask questions. As a parent, Will would like to be informed about the tryout result and why his child did not make the team: "I'd like to see it on paper, why my kid didn't make it" (p. 12). He immediately noted that as a coach, "logistically it's a nightmare with the number of kids that are there, but yeah, that is what I too would want as a parent" (Will, p. 12). Another coach, Leigh, thinks that for the age group under review, 13-15, conversations with parents are very important. She prefers to use phone calls to inform her players of their tryout results and she "will actually talk to the parents first and then we would let the athlete know if they made the team or not" (p. 2). She added "We told the parents first, because I thought the child might break down, so I wanted to let one of the parents know so they could be there to comfort and to help remind the child that we found some positives in their tryout too" (p. 5). Leigh later acknowledged that although parents might care to know the reasons why their child did not make the team, that is, the areas where the child needs to improve; the parents' lack of sport expertise might make

this kind of information irrelevant. Reflecting upon this, and what she would want as a parent she said:

> A lot of parents aren't sport-minded. They don't know that sport and so what their child needs to work on might not make any sense to them. For me, I don't need to hear their [my child's] weaknesses but I need to know that my kid hears some good things" (p. 15).

She added that she personally would appreciate hearing about her child's strengths demonstrated at the tryout as evaluated by the coach, in order to be able to "reinforce the good stuff that they said" (Leigh, p. 15). Leigh's perspective as a parent and coach is that parents should be informed of the tryout result, but that the specific reasons as to why the youth was not selected may be better left for the conversation between the coach and youth.

To summarize, questions were raised about shifting roles and responsibilities between coaches and parents, in addition to 'if' and 'should' these roles change when considering community or school sport. What is clear is that some feel that coaches should be more forthcoming to parents with information about tryouts and subsequent results, while others believe this would be beyond a coach's responsibilities.

Parents Present During Release Interaction

Aside from being informed that tryouts are occurring, and becoming aware of the team selection decisions, the question of whether parents have a place during actual interactions when youth first learn of their elimination was discussed. That is, participants offered perspectives about parents being included in phone conversations,

and in face-to-face meetings together with the athlete and coach. Several participants thought that yes, parents have a clear place within these interactions; others said that no parents should not be included in personal discussions between coaches and athletes, and some said that only under certain circumstances would it become relevant to include parents.

Brett, who was once eliminated from hockey, sees a clear role for parents of youth in this age category when facing the news of their elimination. He said:

> There's some kids that are still really dependent on their parents then. Why not? The parents are just as much of the team as the kid. Especially at that age. The whole hockey revolves around – most sport revolves around parents helping out. … Also, too, I think it would put more pressure on coaches to be a little more sincere. With a 13 year old kid you can brush them off pretty quick and make it quick. With another adult they'd have to be pretty sincere (p. 12).

While Brett cites several reasons as to why he thinks parents ought to be present for this interaction, Coach Alyson notes that in her experience parents need to be involved whenever she cannot find any places within her organization for youth because the parents need to be present when options with other clubs are discussed. She said, "When I get down to not accepting someone on the team, absolutely I would like to speak to the parents, and usually for alternates as well" (Alyson, p. 3). That is, following tryouts in her sport, skaters are chosen for core spots and earn places within the choreographed routine while several others are chosen as alternates and only get to skate if and when they become more skilled than the core skaters, or should a core skater become injured. She elaborated:

> Anytime I am talking to a skater about tryouts I say 'would you like your parents to come into the room to talk as well?', because I think it's extremely important that the parents know what is going on, what their skater needs to work on, why they didn't make it as a core position, otherwise they are not going to know what to work on to improve to make it into the line even that year, or the next year (Alyson, p. 2).

Alyson explained that she used to accomplish this by hosting face-to-face meetings with each athlete trying out for her teams and would invite parents to join the meeting, yet she now prefers phoning each athlete and when applicable, speaks to the parents at the same time as the athlete facing elimination, or being offered an alternate position.

A parent, Mary, struggled to decide how she would inform youth of their elimination and suggested that "if the coach gave a phone call which is not as personal as one-on-one but is still a conversation, in a non-threatening environment – the child would be at home and the coach can talk, and the parents could be on the line if that is what's wanted" (p. 10). Mary is not the only one who makes the suggestion that perhaps coaches should give youth the option of including their parents in discussions about team selections. Adrienne, another sport parent, believes that whether or not a parent should be present during face-to-face meetings with coaches following tryouts depends upon the child's wishes. She noted, "I think it really depends on the kid. They could ask the kid if they want their parents in on the evaluation or not" (Adrienne, p. 4). She explained that her daughters would likely not have wanted a parent to join them in a discussion with the coach when then were 13-15, but mentioned that she understands how many other youth might feel quite differently.

When Julia's son was eliminated from hockey parents were not invited to sit in on the meetings but she communicated, "I think it's okay – I felt alright with it." (Julia, p. 2). She also noted, "That's the way that they have generally always done it, and so I was used to that process" (p. 4). For Julia, due to her familiarity with how 'the hockey system' works, she assumed the exclusion of parents to be acceptable mostly because she thought that practice was most typical. Another parent, Heather, had stronger reasons for excluding the parents and reported that inviting parents into the dressing room with the youth being eliminated "would be just gross. Can you imagine having the parents come in with the kid when you're cutting the kid? No. I don't think so. Parents are too emotional" (p. 17). Perhaps the applicability of this statement to all parents is contentious, yet Heather's experience leads her to believe that parents have no place within the interaction between youth and the coach at least so far as representative minor hockey is concerned. Similarly, Dave who coaches hockey, believes that meetings to discuss tryout results should remain for the coaching staff and youth, yet thinks parents should not be completely left out. In speaking about parents he told me "They are most definitely welcome to talk to us afterwards, but not during the release process" (Dave, p. 5). He later mentioned however that there are sometimes exceptions where parents need to be more directly involved in the discussions and decisions pertaining to the tryout results.

Dave explained that in some cases a player's position would need to be agreed upon in advance, and in those cases the parents need to be part of the discussion. He offered an example of a goal-tender:

> The parents and the player had the opportunity to play Bantam Double A, and play 50-50; or play with us and play 30-70, in that range. So they're going to play 3 out of 10 games. If you're a 13 year old, how do you assess that? Is that fine with you? If it is, you're on the team; if not, we'll go get another goalie because we had two or three others in mind. We had to make sure that was clear before we made that selection. That is why the parents needed to be present" (Dave, p. 7).

He illustrates an example of where choices are offered and athletes are asked to make decisions about where they would like to participate given certain caveats. Under these kinds of circumstances, Dave finds it very important to have parents present in order to help their child make informed decisions. Julia, a sports mom, also thinks that there are times when it would be suitable for parents to be part of a face-to-face meeting, especially in instances where playing time is discussed.

> I can see parents wanting the justification and thinking well 'I've paid as much as you have and my kid is sitting on the bench' and certainly that would come up. So some might want to be there to hear where their child is going to fit into the team (p. 5).

Julia supposes that in order to reduce potential conflict during the season, all interested parties; thus the coaches, athlete, and parents, should be together during discussions about personal playing time. This is not dissimilar to Alyson who wants to speak to parents in order to explain alternate positions and how to move into core skating positions on her teams.

There was also the suggestion that even though there should always be a role for parents during the tryout process, their role should increase as the level of competition

increases. That is, a few participants alluded to increased involvement by parents when children and youth are vying for positions on very elite teams, as opposed to when their children are trying out for more recreational, or lower level teams. Rick, who coaches at the provincial level, maintains that parents must be involved at every stage and are privy to any information he communicates to the youth. He is quite deliberate in his attempt to let parents see exactly how and why he runs tryouts the way he does. As a result, he noted that parents have an appreciation for the fairness he displays. He shared, "I actually got thank-you cards from parents of kids who got cut. And I said 'Well what's this', and they said 'thank you very much for the fairness in your selection process and the way that you did it'" (p. 9). From his perspective, coaches of youth sport and especially those at the elite levels should aim to be as transparent as possible so that misunderstandings and assumptions are avoided as much as possible. Meg, an athlete, expressed that if her child were trying out for a provincial level team she would "watch the process closely and be very involved" and that she would also like the opportunity to "ask questions and make sure the reason was fair" should her child fail to be selected (p. 9). For less competitive settings, she thinks parents should at the least be informed that tryouts are occurring and be notified of their child's result in order to help them cope and make alternative choices.

Summary of Role of Parents

The role of parents can look quite differently between families, across sports, and when comparing community and school settings. While each participant described the role that parents take during youth sport tryouts personally, overlaps and differences can

be appreciated when considering the need for pre-tryout meetings, informing parents of the tryout process, and whether or not parents should be present during release interactions. It was discussed that there are times when the level of involvement by the parents should be directed by the wishes of the youth, but we must be reminded that in order for this to happen coaches must be willing to grant that choice to the youth involved.

Why Coaches Use Their Method

When examining the various communication methods available to inform youth of their non-selection following tryouts, many participants were eager to discuss the question of why coaches use their given method. When noting some of their concerns, especially regarding feedback, many participants then wanted to speak about potential rationale or justifications as to why certain communication methods are chosen over others. In addressing this question four broad sub-themes became apparent: logistics, coach development and learning, emotional reactions, and the avoidance of confrontations.

Logistics – 'Quick and Dirty'

Participants explained that many coaches who do not choose a method of communication to deliver tryout results that allows for personal conversations is due to constraints on coaches' time. It was clear that all participants were familiar with lists: either being posted in hallways, sport facilities, e-mailed or posted on websites, or read aloud. There was also a resounding assumption that this method is chosen by coaches

simply because of the minimal time and effort required to inform all youth of their tryout results. An athlete, Meg, said "It's convenient and easy" (p. 5) and Mary, a parent, echoed this in saying "It's simple and easy. It's quick and dirty. Coaches are busy" (p. 11). Athlete Sarah speculated about why when she faced elimination the coach did not provide any feedback and thought, "Maybe he just didn't want to take the time to talk to everybody" (p. 10). Athlete Brett is less forgiving and said:

> I think coaches prefer the quickest. They don't really care about hurting the kids' feelings, they just want an elite team that's going to win. From what I know about rep coaches, they're serious and they have a great core of players every year and they just want to get rid of the wish-wash right away. They probably just want to not call you back again and not deal with those getting cut (p. 9).

Whether or not these assumptions made by athletes and parents are the true and sole reasons for why coaches use lists when announcing team selections is not the question at hand. Through our discussions it became clear that perhaps the 'actual', yet often unknown reasons behind the coaches' decisions about communication methods are arguably less important than what is interpreted by the other invested parties. That is, when parents and athletes speculate about lists being rationalized because of their simplicity, they tend to have bitter tastes in their mouths regarding that coach and that tryout experience, and this sometimes spreads to become harmful sentiments about youth competitive sports in general.

While all participants were familiar with lists being used to inform athletes of their tryout results, most noted that this method seems most apparent in school settings as opposed to community sport programs. Participants were quick to note that logistical

concerns were likely the reason so many school coaches post or read lists rather than hosting meetings or placing phone calls to inform youth of their tryout results. Coach Rick, who has family members who coach in high schools noted:

> Well in my experience with high school sports is that they are really limited in the amount of time they have to select and prepare a team. I think there are probably not enough teachers that want to become involved in those types of things, so the ones that do end up coaching many of the teams (Rick, p. 14).

A shortage of eager and qualified teachers to coach school teams is likely true in many circumstances. However some believe that teachers too often consider their school coaching responsibilities together with their already large teaching load, as opposed to viewing it as a volunteer position just like a community coach would who has his or her own day-job and separate coaching role. That is, some feel that if school coaches perceptually separated coaching school teams from their teaching, marking, and class preparation time, they may reconsider the amount of time they actually have to communicate tryout results. John, an athlete, explained that teacher coaches usually post lists because it is easiest and speculated that teachers would say "'I have papers to mark, I have to get ready for next class', and that is probably why coaches can't spend personal time with each youth" (p. 22). John suggested however that this really is not different from community coaches who also have work to get done during the day. Nevertheless, many participants noted that coaches, and especially school coaches, must be too busy to inform athletes of their tryout results by any manner other than using lists (posting, reading aloud or otherwise).

To offer an alternative perspective on time, Rick, when coaching the provincial level ringette team notes that despite the large amount of time he spends on providing players with feedback, he feels that it is a necessary part of the job. Rick provides written feedback in a report card form throughout the tryout process so that athletes can learn and apply new skills to improve their performance before the team selection is complete. Rick acknowledges that creating bi-weekly reports for each player is time consuming and articulated, "There's more work in it. There is definitely more work in it. But I think in the long run, it's probably a better process because on a scheduled basis you're reinforcing skills that the player has to improve upon" (Rick, p. 6). He explained that only if players are receiving ongoing feedback about their performance and effort throughout the tryout sessions "It shouldn't come as a surprise at the end that you didn't make the team… If you haven't been telling the guy you have to improve here, here, and here, he's not going to understand why he didn't make the team" (Rick, p. 15). Whilst Rick is speaking about time spent with players during the tryout process (he also spends individual time with each of them afterwards to discuss their evaluation and to explore alternative options), it is his value for time that is oppositional to the presumed attitude of coaches who see time as a constraint towards reaching their goal of selecting the best team.

Unfortunately, many participants voiced negative assessments towards coaches who use the lack of time as an excuse for not having direct contact and discussions with athletes when releasing them from a sport program. Contentious opinions about the busy schedule of coaches were explored and differences between community and school coaches were questioned. While some maintain that coaches need to take the time with

athletes in order to achieve all the aforementioned benefits of feedback, others recognize and appreciate the logistical constraints involved in communicating directly with what could be a significantly large group of eliminated athletes. Will, a coach, about posting lists said "It may seem to be a cop-out but there's just too many kids" (Will, p. 16). In his experience, he and his coaching colleagues have found insufficient time in order to choose communication methods conducive towards speaking personally with each athlete. Despite suggestions that decisions may be made with the question of time being the only consideration, other factors were noted to contribute towards the decisions coaches make when selecting a method to communicate tryout results.

Coach Learning Process

Participants speculated and explained how a coach's personal learning process impacts the choices they make when determining how to inform athletes about team selections. Some figured that the manner chosen by coaches is a result of their experiences with tryouts during their own youth. Athlete Meg suggested, "Maybe it's just the way growing up they saw being done, so it's the way that they adopted" (p. 5). Similarly, Leigh, a coach, speculated specifically about why list posting seems so common for school sports and said "When I played sport in school it was just a list. So teacher coaches of today are used to seeing it done that way" (p. 16). Lastly, athlete John noted that coaches are likely to choose a method "because they don't know any other way" (p. 16). On the flip side of this, one participant suggested "Coaches may never have been cut and so they may not appreciate the emotion and hurt of the experience"

(Marc, p. 1). This would mean that coaches are not relying on their own personal experiences when choosing which communication method to use.

However, coach participants in this study did note that they have made communication method choices based on their experiences with different methods. While coach Will said "We've tried all sorts of ways to try to lessen the blow", coach Dave explained how he learned from examples offered by his sons' coaches as well as his own coaching experience with different methods (Will, p. 1). Dave explained how he came to choose his current team selection delivery method:

> I went through it as a hockey parent. My boys were released from hockey teams and they've been released in different ways and I've just taken that information and think there's a wrong way of doing it and that's a good way of doing it. Through my years there's no better way than being honest, up-front, and realistic (p.12).

He recounted a specific example where he observed the way in which his son's hockey coach delivered tryout results. He remembered that the coaches "were out in the parking lot giving them results letters, with no feedback. Absolutely none" (Dave, p.12). He decided that this appeared cowardly, and questioned the coaches' need to drive away in such a hurry. He summarized his learning:

> Coaches have different methods. There's nasty ones out there and there's some good ones. So, for me, I absorbed all that, and like I said I've experienced some wrong ways and some right ways. The best way is providing feedback and being open and honest and being I guess – what's the word – being not harsh (p. 13).

Coach Dave noted how he learned from other coach's examples but added "you want to do it within the guidelines that you're technically taught to do and what you think is morally right" (p. 24). This refers to the training offered by Dave's hockey club in which coaches do receive some guidelines about release procedures.

Another coach, Alyson, relayed her experience with communication methods and noted that she has performed tryouts involving eliminations for adolescents in this age group more than 50 times. She has been able to learn from her experiences and feels as though she has now chosen a method that best reflects her learning. When she first started coaching she would post a list of the skaters who had made the team but was quick to say "It's not a nice thing to do to the skaters! It gives you no opportunity to talk to them and let them know why they were chosen as an alternate or why they were released from the team" (p. 1). Alyson elaborated on why she no longer uses list posting:

> When you choose your alternates if one of the girls decides that she doesn't want to skate, you don't really have much recourse in calling back the girls who were cut. They feel like you didn't want them. They feel hurt. And if you call them back, they say 'no thanks you, you've hurt me' or 'you didn't want me – you think I'm crap'. There are other ways of doing it that I will describe that work much better" (p. 1).

In Alyson's experience, circumstances arise when a skater who was formally eliminated from the team may be offered an alternate position due to another skater declining a position on the team. In her quote above, she explained that when her skaters were released via a list they were less likely to take her up on a later offer to join the team. The next section will deal more specifically with communication methods and emotional

reactions, yet it is relevant here to note that Alyson learned that it was not desirable to have skaters feeling that way after being eliminated.

After deciding that list-posting was not the right method for her, Alyson used to hand out sheets of paper which indicated "who made the team, or who made the team as an alternate, or who should find another program" (p. 1). She subsequently learned that this method also resulted in too many skaters leaving the sport and said that the skaters' feelings were hurt as a result of getting an elimination letter instead of an interaction with the coaches. She now uses two methods and her choice depends on how many youth are involved and thus how many people need to be informed of their tryout results. If there are not too many she noted that she may host face-to-face meetings where she can speak to each youth about their tryout result. She notes that the order of the meetings is important because she needs to know if skaters want to decline an offer to be on the team so that she can offer their spot to other skaters lower on her list. The reason she would use this method when the group was small is due to the waiting that families have to do following the final tryout. She explained:

> The only problem with that is you have kids waiting out in the hall for quite a while wondering why you haven't called on them. They have a tendency to know where they stand on the list. So it's a little more obvious to the skaters who is doing what on the team. But is does give you answers more promptly and you can talk face-to-face with the skaters and face-to-face with the parents (p. 2).

So for Alyson, the face-to-face interactions work well but she has learned that for larger groups this method is not her best choice.

Alyson said that when faced with a significant number of youth to inform "the way I do it now works really well" (p. 1). In these cases, which are typical for her as many skaters vie for places on her teams each year, she calls skaters the night of the final tryout and during the next day. She explained that families are aware and expecting the phone calls and asks that they be prepared to accept or decline her offer at the time of the call so that she can take other skaters should positions open up. Again, the order of the phone calls matters, and she notes that she calls the skaters being offered core positions first, then skaters being offered alternate positions, and finally skaters for whom she cannot place on that particular team. She mentioned, "Sometimes I will have an assistant coach help out by calling the core skaters, but like I said, I would much rather do it all myself because then I know they are all getting the good feedback" (Alyson, p. 5). Alyson acknowledges that some of the methods she used in the past resulted in outcomes incongruent with her coaching values. She is clear in her desire to want to motivate skaters to pursue the sport of synchronized skating, and she now understands that the way in which she communicates tryout results demonstrates and supports this. She is modest when speaking about the performance-based achievements of her teams but speaks directly to the tryout communication procedures in saying "They keep coming back and we keep growing, so we must be doing something right" (Alyson, p. 5).

The rationale behind the decision to use one method of communication over others when coaches announce tryout results has been both speculative and reported. While I did not speak to any coaches who admitted that they use a given method simply due to their familiarity with it during their own youth, many participants speculate that this occurs particularly within school sports. Participant coaches did provide insight as to

how their experiences in making team selections and having to communicate those results, and by observing how other coaches proceed with delivering tryout results have helped them to determine a good match for themselves. Notably related to this is how coaches measure and perceive athlete reaction to tryout communication methods.

Emotional Reactions – How they Help Determine the Method of Choice

Included in learning through experience with different tryout communication methods are assessing athlete emotional reactions to the various methods. Even in the absence of actual experience with various methods, individuals make decisions about which method to use based on their speculations about how athletes would react emotionally to different methods. That is, in addition to gauging logistical considerations, learning general pros and cons of the methods by having experience with them, coaches also make decisions about which method to use based on how youth react emotionally, or are likely to react in the face of a given method. In this section I am going to speak more directly about specific methods of communication due to the fact that participants spoke about particular methods when describing the emotional reaction considerations they make for each.

When informing youth of their tryout results Leigh is conscious of the athletes' emotions and does not want them to be anxiously awaiting their fate for too long. As a result, she ensures that youth know the result of their tryout promptly. She lets the families know to expect a call from her and asks for specific times when she will be able to reach families when both the youth and a parent will be home. She explains that they will all receive their call:

> Usually by the next day. We don't want them stewing. I didn't want them stewing at home for 3 or 4 days, wondering if they'd make it or not, but you need time at the end of the last tryout to discuss and talk and then usually coaches go to work the next day (p. 3/4).

In addition to being concerned with their anxiety in waiting for their result, Leigh is deliberate in wanting parents to be home when she places her calls so that they are able to help with hurt feelings resulting from unsuccessful tryouts. She concluded by saying, "The phone calls, they take time, but I don't know, I think people are worth it" (Leigh, p. 10). Leigh also recognizes the logistical concerns involved with making so many phone calls, but when considering the emotional reactions involved with awaiting a tryout result, or when learning that you were unsuccessful in gaining membership on the team, Leigh maintains that her method of placing phone calls is a good fit.

Participants spoke about the pros and cons of face-to-face meetings and specifically about the impact of this method on emotional reactions by youth who were not selected for membership in the program. Parent Mary recalled experiences about face-to-face meetings with coaches and noted that a drawback of having these types of interactions is that the youth:

> Either come out celebrating or looking totally sad. And the other kids are sitting here sweating, waiting their destiny or doom, and it's very public and visible – and so I don't know how I could change this part. Because something less threatening would be best. Because this wouldn't be the best way for most kids (p. 10).

She then suggested, "if the room had two doors – that would be best" indicating one door to enter and a different one to exit (p. 10). She is thus concerned that the individual emotional reactions to tryout results are perhaps not best suited for the audience of youth awaiting their own result. Athlete Brett suggested the same thing:

> I'd have every kid line up outside and I'd have them all walk in one at a time, and I'd have them leave through a different door, that way they couldn't go out with a big smile on their face or be in tears in front of all the others (p. 7).

These participants are concerned with the emotional reactions of eliminated youth when having to face the other youth and their families, and prefer a system where youth could deal with their emotional reactions in a more private environment.

When participants considered the methods of posting or reading aloud the list of athletes chosen for membership on the team at hand many of the comments were similar to athlete Meg's when she said "It's a very public way of announcing who got cut" (p. 4). That is, participants voiced concerns for the conflicting emotional reactions that are likely to occur when a group of youth become aware of the tryout result at the same time in near proximity to one-another. An athlete, Sarah, elaborated on one of her experiences with list posting:

> The coach would say okay the list is going to be up tomorrow morning on the bulletin board. And then the next day you'd get to school and run down to the bulletin board and see if your name was there. There'd be a huge group of girls there because we all got to school at the same time. They all hover around the board and look to see whose names were there. If I made it I was conscious of not shouting out 'yes! I made it!', I was like 'whew, I made it', quietly to myself,

> but not everyone was like that. Some girls were really loud and excited when they saw they made it, and I think this made the ones who didn't make it feel even worse cause it was like having it rubbed in their face (p. 5).

Sarah subsequently explained that having all the athletes expressing their immediate emotional reactions in front of one another would not be what she would like for youth should she have to perform team selections for youth that age. She articulated her belief that the youth who were unsuccessful in making the team are perhaps going to become even more unmotivated to pursue other alternative options once they have had to suffer through the gleeful demonstrations of the ones earning membership. Erin expressed nearly the same concern and when she learned that she had not made a team by noting her absence on list posted in the school gymnasium hall. She said:

> It was especially awkward to find out in a public space, where I was conscious of who was around me, and how I would react. I had to maintain composure while figuring out what to do (Erin, p. 2).

From Sarah and Erin's perspectives a more private environment allowing the athletes to absorb their personal result is more appropriate.

Similar to coach Alyson's experience where she learned that in posting a list she felt she had little recourse to call athletes when positions opened up after the fact , coach Leigh has speculated about the same thing. Even though she has not lived through an experience where she learned that posting a list could result in unfavourable relationships with eliminated athletes, she has predicted what the emotional reactions would be by athletes should she release them through a posted list. Leigh expected that should she utilize a list to inform soccer players of their non-selection instead of interacting with

them personally to discuss their tryout, that she would sever any relationship she had with them. With frank language she told me:

> I couldn't post a list for a team that I'm going to work with all year, with people with whom I have a relationship. You want kids to come back, right. They might not come back because I'm a hose bag of a coach and, I want them to come back" (p. 13).

Leigh has thus assumed that eliminated players would react negatively towards her, and would be less likely to want to pursue future soccer opportunities on her team, which is precisely the opposite of what she would like to happen. It is clear that some participants worry about potential harmful emotional reactions associated with learning of one's elimination through a posted list.

Two other considerations were offered by sport parents, and although they do not specifically relate to the emotional reactions discussed above, they are worth mentioning here. Adrienne, a sports mom, recounted an experience when one of her daughters was informed of her tryout result by receiving a personalized letter. Adrienne could not recall whether or not this coach invited the non-selected youth to meet at a later time in order to discuss their tryout evaluation, nor could she recall if he made himself available for follow-up telephone discussions. About the letters however, she said "it gives you a chance to hold the emotions in better, or let them out privately" (Adrienne, p. 1). She thus saw value in affording disappointed youth some time and privacy to deal with their immediate emotional reactions related to being eliminated. Similarly, another mom commented on an experience where youth were informed of their elimination through face-to-face meetings with the coach. She suggested that following these meetings

players should have the opportunity to follow-up with coaches because their emotional reactions to being eliminated might hinder their ability to hear or understand some of the valuable feedback that coaches offer within the same conversation where they learn of their non-selection. About the feedback and the ability to soak it in, parent Heather thought, "I don't know if they want to hear it right away. Some do, some don't" (p. 19).

Participants have reported that the method of communication through which athletes learn of their non-selection should be chosen with considerations made to potential or likely emotional reactions of eliminated youth. Implications with regard to timing, the ability for parents to be involved as supporters, as well as specific ramifications of face-to-face meetings, phone calls, posted and read lists, and letters were noted by participants in this study.

Let's Just Avoid any Confrontation!

The final consideration that emerged as a reason behind decisions to choose one method of communication over others was that of avoiding confrontations. Simply put, many coaches may choose a method to communicate their tryout results that allows them the greatest chance to avoid confrontations with athletes or parents. Athlete Sarah reflected upon her many tryout experiences and empathized with coaches wanting to avoid discussions with athletes being eliminated and supposes that it's mostly because of coaches "not wanting to say 'you're not good'" (p. 10). Erin suspected that many coaches use posted lists to inform their athletes of their tryout results "because it's easiest and you don't have to deal with any direct confrontation. Nobody likes informing someone of bad news" (Erin, p. 1). This recognition is similar to the explanation coach

Dave cites as to why his club has policies which limit face-to-face release meetings. In his club, coaches are required to use lists to post tryout results at certain stages of the process and I asked him why. He told me, "I think it comes down to it's hard on everybody. It's too hard on coaches" (Dave, p. 9). He also speculated that the club limits the face-to-face interactions because of the difficulty involved in explaining 'why' a player does not make the team. He said, "I believe that the age dictates that it's awfully hard to explain to a 13 or 14 year old that you need to be developed at a lower level or you're at that age and you just didn't make it. If you're 14 it's a hard one. I believe that's the rationale" (Dave, p. 9). While I have previously discussed how there is a consensus amongst participants about the difficulty involved in communicating tryout results, some participants are critical when scrutinizing coaches who dodge confrontations.

One father stated, "Posting a list is the hard-nosed way. It avoids issues. The coach doesn't have to speak to anyone" (Marc, p. 1). An athlete, when commenting about team lists posted in schools, said, "It seems to me that the coach is trying to run away from the problem and trying not to answer the kids' questions about why they got cut" (John, p. 16). The reality for some coaches is that confrontations do occur, and the nature of the interactions is such that coaches can feel threatened, berated, and may lose motivation towards coaching. One coach participant in particular is an animated speaker and vibrantly recounted some of his experiences with confrontations. While some of his interactions following tryouts have been hostile, others he recalls with slight amusement. Will compared some of the confrontations he's had with athletes who had just been released to those on reality TV shows such as 'American Idol'. He explained:

> The ones that make it onto TV are the ones that freak out and tell Simon where to go and so on and so forth, and 'you're not stopping me', 'I'm going to be a big star one day', and so on and so forth, and we get the same thing sometimes (p. 10).

Although these kinds of interactions are a waste of time for Will, he is more concerned about confrontations with athletes or parents who are aggressive.

Previous negative interactions with families have caused Will to feel judged by parents of youth who are eliminated from his teams or programs. He summarized the way he feels:

> I'm a nice guy, I have a good family, I go to church, I work, I don't cheat on my taxes, there's all sorts of things I could show you that show you that I'm an honest individual. However, if I cut your kid, I'm the spawn of the devil, I'm corrupt, I don't have a brain, and obviously I'm not a very good man" (Will, p. 14).

He explained that he is made to feel this way by the way he is interrogated following tryout choices:

> They ask all sorts of leading questions to try to find the crack in your excuse and I think in some situations they think that you honestly don't like the kid and that that's the reason you're cutting them… that's the nature of the discussions I've had (Will, p. 5).

Due to overwhelming confrontations with youth and parents regarding tryout decisions, Will defended his choice for using posted lists to announce tryout results. Will noted that while not all, and not even most families are likely to confront the coaching staff in aggressive ways after a list is posted, enough do so to make it necessary for the staff to

post the list and disappear. He told me about how he and his fellow coaches have often felt inundated by families wishing to speak to him:

> Sometimes you have to be like a secret agent trying to get out of there, you know, trying to get to your car before some parent tracks you down in the parking lot. They're emotional, and in certain situations you become a punching bag, a verbal punching bag (Will, p. 17).

While I have already devoted with a section to the role of parents within the process of communicating tryout results, it is clear that for some coaches the role of parents coincides with confrontations and leads to decisions aimed at reducing face-to-face contact.

In many cases it probably goes without saying that when one's child is eliminated the parents will also be disappointed. A parent, Heather, explained how parents can feel when their children are eliminated: "the parents are devastated too. It affects the parents too" (p. 11). Athlete Brett does not doubt that some parents could produce argumentative interactions following tryout result announcements and said, "I can see coaches being extremely intimidated by some parents…. I think there are some parents who are so extreme out there. I can see it if they had a kid who was cut, they'd freak out" (p. 13). Coach Leigh spoke about one experience where a parent verbally abused her over the phone, yet she noted, "That was an extreme example. Most parents were really quite okay" (p. 4). Another coach, Dave, echoes the same message that while some parents can cause large amounts of coaching grief, the large majority of parents are supportive of the coaching goals. He elaborated, "There's a lot of incredible hockey parents, despite the negative portrayal of them. But they are very, very realistic people. I have always had

good dealings with them" (Dave, p. 11). While parents may share their youth's grief about being eliminated, these coaches note that only some will react adversely in confrontation with the coach.

It is worthwhile exploring how one coach aims to reduce and even prevent confrontational interactions with parents. Alyson has never had a negative confrontation with parents regarding tryouts. She explained that to achieve this you must be conscious of:

> How you deal with it. It's telling them 'these are our decisions we've made and you need to trust us as coaches, and if you can't trust us to make the right decisions, then this probably is not the right organization for you'. But I never have issues like that because I tell the parents what they need, I just give them the info about tryouts and usually when you have a problem it's because you haven't been upfront, you haven't been honest, or you haven't been consistent" (Alyson, p. 5).

She relates this to her choices about communication methods and notes how parents need to be involved in the process in order to avoid later accusations and confrontations. Alyson explained that dealing with the parents and with the eliminated athlete is the only way to ensure that everyone can move forward in a positive direction. Having an open door policy is important for her, and parents or skaters are able to follow-up with tryout related questions at any time:

> It's just such an open organization. Anybody can call, e-mail, stop me in the hall to ask as many questions as they want, and it never fails. Once I've talked with the parents the issue is resolved. So it's about communication (Alyson, p. 6).

It is clear that communication is related to confrontations with parents and athletes, and the statements from these research participants suggests that if communication is limited or absent when announcing tryout results, confrontations might be more likely to occur. That is, the process of having discussions, either face-to-face or over the phone about individual tryout results may, in some circumstances, decrease the chances of aggressive meetings later on.

Summary of Why Coaches Choose Their Method

The question of why coaches do what they do when announcing their tryout results is certainly complex and has connections with many of the other aforementioned areas. Coaches feel the logistical strain of having to communicate results to a potentially large group in a relatively short time, and some might be limited to the methods about which they are already familiar. Some coaches benefit through their experiences or by observing the experiences of others and this is closely related to their assessment and speculations about how athletes react or are likely to react emotionally in response to various methods. The fact that some choices are also made in order to avoid confrontations with emotional youth or parents needs to be considered and perhaps the relationship between this and ongoing communication needs to be addressed. In the section dealing with the role of parents, the benefits of pre-tryout communication meetings were discussed and there could also be a link forged between these meetings and the avoidance of confrontations once results are announced. These issues are likely not the only factors considered when coaches need to choose a method to communicate their tryout results, but they were the issues as discussed by these research participants.

Individuality

Questions about individuality arose as participants considered why they prefer certain methods of communication over others. That is, as each participant was asked which factors contribute towards making 'better' choices of methods to communicate tryout results to youth aged 13-15, aside from the many considerations noted above (feedback, role of parents and so on), many spoke about individual preferences and needs. Coach Rick stated "Every kid is probably different and has a preference" (p. 15). Likewise, sports parents Mary said, "Different kids are going to react differently" (p. 5) and Adrienne suggested that finding the right choice "depends on the child" (p. 6). It became clear that an investigation into issues of individuality surrounding the communication of tryout results was required.

Quite a few participants were interested in knowing why I choose the 13-15 year old age bracket, and I explained to them a bit about Côté and his colleagues' research suggesting that adolescents in this age (13-15) are likely in their 'specializing' years (1999; 2002; 2003). Most participants agreed with this framework and confirmed that they, their children, or the children they coached, were in reality reducing the number of sports in which they participated in favour of one or two favourites. What was interesting however, and relates to the issue of individuality, is the personal investment each child brings to a tryout. I believe that the youths' personal investment is quite significant and while it probably deserves much more attention in the form of research studying it outright, I will still mention it here because individual investment does play a role in how tryout result communication methods are perceived and what meanings are derived from the experience. That is, the meanings expressed and issues brought forth by the athletes

in particular are shaped within a context in which the investment they have placed in attending a tryout and wishing to earn a place on the team in considered. Certainly, some athletes attend a tryout with a fierce desire to be on the team, while others may attend the tryout with far less invested. The level of their investment is, in my view, directly related to their identity, and the ways in which youth would like their identity to be read.

A youth with a strong desire to earn membership is likely wanting to be identified as an athlete within that particular sport, much more so than the athlete who attends the tryout on a whim. A father, Marc, noted "My son's identity wasn't threatened when he tried out and didn't make the team because he created his identity in other areas too. He wasn't depending on making the team" (p. 3). Marc was not suggesting that his son's detached perspective on making the team reduced Marc's concern for the aforementioned considerations and issues surrounding the various communication methods; rather he was noting that his son had a different level of investment heading into the tryout than did some of the other athletes for whom being selected was much more important. Adrienne, a sports mom, highlights this difference by comparing her two daughters and speculated about them both being eliminated, "Jacqui's just so determined that if she didn't succeed in this one she's going to try three times harder. That's just the way Jacqui is. If it would have been Holly, she wouldn't try out again. Different personalities." (p. 11).

Personal levels of investment are also illustrated when youth, particularly at this age, desire to be on a high school level team after meeting success as a member of their former elementary school team. Athlete John was forthcoming about his strong desire to gain membership on the basketball team upon entering high school:

> I trained the entire summer with basketball trying to make sure I could make this team…When tryouts did occur I felt pretty confident that I had a good shot at this. I mean, I was one of the best kids from my [elementary] school (p. 2).

Despite investing heavily into making the team, John was unsuccessful in making it and his experience, lasting thoughts, and suggestions are mediated by this.

Another reason for having a strong desire to make a team is to maintain a certain sports identity amongst peers. A sport mom related her son's experience with hockey and noted his intense wish to have a successful tryout, "He put a lot of pressure on himself because of his brother and making the friends and playing with them on rep – because they had all played together since they were 6 years old" (Julia, p. 1). She explained that her older son was always successful in making the highest level of hockey for his age and this created pressure for the younger son, as did the fact that he wanted to continue to play with his best friends who also played with him at the highest levels in years prior. Also from the hockey context, coach Dave talked to me about the individual differences he considers when delivering his tryout results pertaining to age eligibility. Dave finds that the age of players as it relates to their eligibility impacts their level of investment upon entering a tryout. As a result he finds it either easier or harder to deliver the tryout results to the players depending upon these factors. He explained:

> A 13 year old: you tell them they're just not ready, they need a year at Bantam Double A and if they work hard, they may be there next year. It's a little bit easier for a 13 year old. A 14 year old: we really have to let the player know why they're not selected. I mean, a 13 year old, you still have to let them know why, but it's not as shocking to them (p. 5).

Dave illuminates the fact that depending upon their age, only some youth will have other chances of earning membership within a certain team at certain levels, and finds it personally challenging to inform those players who are deeply invested but will not have another opportunity the following year.

The increasing level of competition was previously discussed when considering the role of parents and some parents suggested that parents should be more involved when youth are involved with elite youth sport. Elite youth sport is also relevant here as personal investments are arguable higher on average. That is to say, that even though participants described how youth investment was mediated by factors like other interests, previous success, deliberate practice, pressure to be like other family members, and the desire to be with friends, some suggested that on average, children attending Provincial or National level team tryouts are likely to be more invested in maintaining their identity through that sport, than a child attending a local tryout because his or her friend suggested that it would be a neat thing to try. I would thus contend that even within Côté's three-stage model variations occur as youth may still be interested in 'sampling' sports even when aged 13 and older, whereas others may already be through their 'specializing' years and may be entering 'investment'. This assuredly impacts how families consider tryouts and Adrienne, a sports mom, spoke directly about elite sport. Adrienne explained that she believes that it is less okay to use list posting to inform youth of their non-selection when youth are trying out for very elite sport. She finds that the more competitive: the more invested the children are, and so the more they deserve and require feedback on their performance. She contended that these children especially need

"some constructive criticism of things to work on, to strive for, to set new goals" (Adrienne, p. 7).

Athlete Brett made a similar suggestion noting that youth being eliminated from very high level sport ought to receive a significant amount of feedback and affective reassuring. He said, "I think maybe the higher you go provincially the kids will be more hurt if they're cut. The coach might have to be a little extra special then. You know, even call the mom and say 'I know Tom's upset, but I wish him all the luck, etc, etc." (Brett, p. 11). A moment later Brett wanted to amend his comments and instead thought that despite the level or intensity of the sport program that all children have the potential to be very hurt upon facing elimination and noted that the concern from the coach should reflect this. He elaborated:

> Like the guys that you're playing with at the provincial level or just at the rec centre, it should be the same. Coaches should have the same investment in every kid to be careful of their feelings. Coaches should put the same investment in every kid when cutting them (Brett, p. 11).

By talking aloud about the issue Brett reveals how complicated things may appear when trying to balance all the considerations of youth at this age. He acknowledges that youth attending elite tryouts might have more on the line so to speak, but wants coaches to recognize that athletes at lower levels too might have deep-seated interests in making a team.

A few participants pondered the idea of coaches asking youth for their personal preferences in methods to be informed of their potential non-selection. That is, some people speculated about the benefits of coaches giving youth the choice of noting how

they would like to be informed should they fail to make the team. Some suggested that coaches could do this when collecting other pre-tryout information from the youth such as their contact and medical information. While it was discussed that this would meet individual needs and requests, the feasibility, and ability of coaches to be able to act on the differing demands is questionable. When I asked one mother for her thoughts on asking coaches to consider individual needs and requests when delivering the tryout results she thought that this would be "putting a huge burden on coaches and most of them are volunteers" (Mary, p. 9). She added, "my philosophy is that it's one thing how we handle our children but when we try to make the external world work for them the way they want it to – well, we can't do that" (ibid). She expressed that although coaches need to be aware of individual differences and reactions to tryout results, she does not think that coaches need to cater their actions in order to meet individual demands. Instead, she suggests that considerations of feedback, and motivation to pursue the sport in other environments should be important to coaches when delivering their tryout results to all athletes.

Summary of Individuality

The place that individuality holds within the process of announcing tryout results is both complicated and difficult to differentiate in light of the many other considerations. Participants noted that youth attend tryouts with varying levels of desire to earn their place, and that some are deeply concerned with attaining or maintaining a certain sport identity. Given that youth at this age are likely trying to specialize within only a few of their favourite sports, it is crucial for coaches to realize what is at stake for these young

athletes. While individual preferences, needs, and reactions vary considerably, some participants contend that youth involved in elite sport require feedback about their unsuccessful tryouts more so than do youth eliminated from other levels of youth sport. The provision of feedback to any eliminated athlete does however seem very important to most participants, and so weighing in on special considerations for elite youth is yet another consideration for coaches. While not mentioned directly by my participants, the individuality of the coaches would most certainly mediate their own choices and preferences in methods.

Take-Home Message

I asked all participants what they think athletes should think as they leave a team elimination process. Specifically for coaches, I wanted them to express what they wanted youth to be taking away with them upon elimination. I asked coaches to think about what they would want the eliminated youth to *think* and *feel* about being eliminated from their team. For the parents and athletes, the question was phrased such that they were asked to say what they think coaches *should* want from athletes in terms of their feelings about being eliminated. Many answers overlapped, and all demonstrated care and concern for the non-selected youth. I will simply list the many answers here and discuss them collectively afterwards.

What do you want/would you want the youth to think/feel/perceive from the experience?

"I think first and foremost that their effort was definitely appreciated and we would love to have a place for them" (Alyson, p. 3).

They shouldn't not feel like they "are not worth anything…you cannot denigrate them" (Alyson, p. 4).

"I want them to think that next time 'I'm going to show that coach'. I want them to be inspired by it. Like, I got cut this time but just you wait. I'll show you" (Sarah, p. 17).

"Maybe an intention should not only be to inspire them to come back next year, but to inspire them to do something this year, or maybe try something else… Because they got cut from one team doesn't mean that they are bad at everything. At this age, they shouldn't be afraid to try new things" (Sarah, p. 17/18).

"Coaches have to make the kids feel like this isn't the end of the world, that everybody has different skills and attributes and abilities. I think it's important, especially at this age that coaches try to get across that just because you got cut from this team, it doesn't mean you're not a volleyball player or whatever the sport is, and it definitely doesn't mean that you're not a good person" (Sarah, p. 18).

"If it's your goal to be on this team, don't give up." (Leigh, p. 6).

"I always tried to make sure they knew they were welcome back; that being cut this year by no means meant this is our team for the next 7 years of their life. That's not the way it's going to be. People get better, people don't get better, people move, people get hurt. So I always said please come back, we want you back. Because you do" (Leigh, p. 8).

"I always emphasize to these kids, because some kids – I want them to know they can come back; some kids might think that they will never be good enough to come back but I want to leave the door open because they're young and there's so much room for growth. I always emphasize, please stay active. If you don't make this team, don't give up on soccer. Please stay with sport because girls and sport – you know, girls hit teenage-hood and they get cut from a team and they think I'll get a job and hang out with boys, and I say, please stay active. And that's a real thing I emphasize" (Leigh, p. 14).

Leigh also tries to be a model to all the girls who come out for tryouts: "there are not a lot of women coaches in soccer right now. . I wanted girls to see you could still be active. I still play soccer, I'm 43, and I want to say, 'you come watch me play. You can play for the rest of your life. Don't give up at 14 because you got cut'. That's a huge message. That's a personal thing for me. I'm into being physically fit and active throughout your life and especially for girls." (Leigh, p. 14).

"Coaches should want the youth to know that everyone has the potential to improve. The kids shouldn't feel like failures; rather they should know where they excel and should be given coaching on where they can grow" (Erin, p. 2).

"So they go away feeling good about themselves, not torn down" (Rick, p. 7).

"The message was always 'Continue to enjoy the game. The last time I checked no one had a big salary for playing ringette. You're not going to make a living out of it, and you're not going to be on TSN very often, so go out and have fun, but play to your very best'. That's all a coach can ask, and that is what I hoped for every player" (Rick, p. 9)

"We should be doing things a little bit better so that even though not everybody gets to play with the A team everybody should feel good about the fact that they did their best, and are not coming away from a tryout with a negative feeling about the sport, and more particularly themselves." (Rick, p. 20).

"You want them to still believe that the hockey playing is still for them and fun for them, and fun first, and competitive second" (Dave, p. 15).

The disconnect between the hopes for how youth feel and how they actually feel is addressed throughout this chapter. While it appears that everyone thinks that youth should feel inspired to continue in sport, and should maintain a positive image of

themselves, how coaches achieve this is the question. Drawing upon the aforementioned issues and meanings surrounding the communication methods, I would suggest that coaches consider these variables as discussed here. Regarding feedback, the role of parents, their personal reasons for making team selection communication methods, and the individuality of players, coaches can also directly consider how they can increase their chances of the eliminated athletes actually feeling the way that the coaches hope they do.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will provide a discussion about how the findings presented in the previous chapter relate back to my original research questions and objectives. I will then discuss any divergences between the original research outline and the actual process and findings. Suggestions for future related research will be offered and the chapter will conclude with practical recommendations for those involved with youth sports.

Research Questions

The first research question was: *What methods are being employed in order to communicate non-selection within youth team sports?* The replies from the participants suggest that many methods, and combinations of methods are employed by coaches such as: phone calls, face-to-face interactions, letters, lists, and personal e-mails. The degree of parent involvement can differ, as can the recipients of the information. For example, in some cases information is disseminated only to those who are successful in earning membership, whereas in other cases every single athlete attending a tryout will receive communication from the coach. A more detailed summary of the methods exposed through this research is found within the introduction of Chapter Four.

The next two questions require in-depth discussions here. The second research question asked: *What role does the method of delivery of non-selection play in the creation of meanings, and in the future sport experiences of those involved in youth sport?* The question has two clear portions, and I will now discuss the first part which

asks: *What role does the method of delivery of non-selection play in the creation of meanings*?

In order to proceed I think it would be best to first define what is meant by 'the creation of meanings'. What I mean by this, is: what do people come to think about, believe, perceive, feel, and understand to be important. Thus, the first part of this research question asks; what do people think about, understand, etc when they consider *how* tryout information was either delivered by them, to them, or to their child through a given method. In other words, the meanings that are created are the same thing as their thoughts, beliefs, understandings, and feelings regarding the process. What is meaningful about the process is what participants articulate when asked to explain how they felt or continue to feel about the *way* they experienced elimination. The first part of the question also asks: how does the actual communication method mediate the way that thoughts, feelings etc were formed.

The findings from this research project suggest that the ways in which participants perceive and feel about being informed, informing, or their child being informed are in fact mediated and dependent upon differing methods of communicating those results. That is, from the perspective of the participants, *how* one is informed, how one's child is informed, or how the coach informs the athletes of their non selection plays a significant role in determining what becomes meaningful for the reporting participant. The many meanings were discussed in the previous chapters but to answer the question of how the communication method mediates this I would suggest that, oftentimes, it is the concerns, shortcomings, or potential shortcomings regarding the situation that become what is meaningful for each participant. That is, the aspects about which the participants had the

strongest feelings, and found the most meaningful, were the elements of the experience where they either felt let-down, or realized they could have been let down. For example, the many athletes and parents who spoke about the need for more and better feedback found this meaningful due to their experience which left them looking for more information. The personal concerns derived from the communication method used thus became the meaningful bits when discussing this process with participants.

The latter part of the second research question asks how the method of delivery affects *future sport experiences of those involved in youth sport*. From the point of view of the athletes, I believe that this was answered in the previous chapter under the feedback section dealing specifically with motivation and learning, and the subsequent section about finding alternative opportunities. It was noted that when athletes have an experience that lacks discussion with coaches (and were thus informed of their elimination in a way that does not allow or encourage feedback provision) that they are less likely to feel motivated, and may not know how to continue participating in their sport. It therefore seems as though methods that allow for this important interaction to occur, such as face-to-face meetings, phone calls, or other forms of interaction are more fitting for those concerned with being able to have a discussion with eliminated athletes about their tryout performance and about their future options. Furthermore, athlete participants often disclosed that if and when they themselves become coaches, that the way in which they experienced becoming informed of their elimination will influence how they would inform their athletes facing similar fates. Thus their future actions within youth sport are self-predicted to be mediated by previous elimination experiences and specifically by the manner in which they were informed.

Coaches noted that their experiences with various methods influenced their decisions when choosing which communication tool to use. Parent participant experiences with youth sport was mediated by their perspective of their children's elimination process and several parents noted that the way in which their child was informed of their elimination helped shape the way in which parents later navigated within youth sport. That is to say, some parents noted that their experiences explained in this research led them to ask more questions of their children's future coaches and for some, they reconsidered their own volunteer coaching roles (if they did any coaching: some did and others did not). So while elimination experiences, and more specifically how one is informed of their non-selection, certainly affects athletes as they consider future sport participation, the experience also mediates future youth sport experiences for parents and coaches alike.

The third research question was: *How are perceptions and meanings associated with the team elimination communication methods similar and/ or dissimilar amongst the coaches, athletes, and parents?* I have previously noted that the meanings expressed by the participants are no more similar within each of the three participant groups than they are when considering the replies from across the entire group of participants. That is, while there were similarities and distinctions across the interview material, there were no clear divisions between the three groups, nor were there unique patterns within the groups.

Findings Situated in Literature

Upon completion of the analysis of this research there remained no academic resources discussing the communication of tryout results to youth from sport or other domains. It is still important to note where the findings of this research do align with related available research. Research related to Côté's (Côté, 1999; Côté & Hay 2002; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, Deakin, 2005; Côté 2006, Fraser-Thomas & Côté 2006; Côté & Fraser-Thomas 2007; Côté, Young, North, & Duffy 2007) work about the specializing years will be noted, as well as links to literature dealing with coach learning, motivation, and the role of parents.

The work of Côté and his colleagues (Côté, 1999; Côté & Hay, 2002; Soberlak & Côté, 2003; Baker, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2005) is valuable in presenting the framework from which the specializing years are understood. Where Côté's work is limited however, is concerning tryouts and the elimination of youth following tryouts. In discussing both positive and negative youth experiences in sport, being eliminated is not mentioned (Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2005). Furthermore, while it is noted that "the number of dropouts reaches a peak in the adolescent years", no mention of involuntary withdrawal is noted (Côté & Hay, 2002, p. 486). In newer work, calls to fill voids surrounding negative outcomes of youth sport are made, yet again lack mention of exclusion following tryouts (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2006).

With respect to youth aged 13-15 who are in their specializing years it is noted that "Coaches must be capable of addressing the goals and needs of individuals with varying skill sets" (Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007, p.12). Although this touches upon the idea that athletes of all abilities, and perhaps those who become eliminated,

require personal attention from coaches, it is understood that Côté and his colleagues are considering only those athletes who are on the team. It is further recommended that "the conveyance of sport-specific feedback become very important" for youth at this age, however the relationship between this and feedback upon exclusion is not made (ibid). Côté and his colleagues do mention tryouts in this context:

> With respect to organizational roles, coaches are now charged with the task of talent selection and choosing members for competitive teams. These decisions and critical as they very much determine whether athletes in the elite developmental trajectory, move to the participation stream, or perhaps withdraw. Coaches should encourage athletes to 'specialize' by focusing on one sport on a year-round basis, and by focusing on one (or perhaps two) positions/roles in a team sport. Excellent coaches should convey the importance of increased practice demands, recognizing that athletes in this category should be training regularly in their specific sport (Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007, p.12).

It is worth noting that while this article explores the requirements for 'excellent coaching', no mention is made about how the delivery of tryout results factors into so-called 'excellence'. Although my own research does not attempt to answer if and how 'excellent coaches' deliver their tryout results in a certain way, it does contribute to knowledge about making informed choices in this regard.

Coach participants noted how they learn about, modify, and change the way in which they inform athletes of their non-selection through personal experience and through observing the practices of others. This is congruent with research contending that coaches do learn a great deal through their experiences and through observation of

other coaches (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007). It was furthermore confirmed through examples provided by coach participants that coaches learn through reflection (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). That is, when coaches employed certain communication methods, reflected upon the resulting disconnect to their own coaching goals, and made subsequent changes, they demonstrated reflection in their coaching. Coaches also demonstrated reflection in this study when they considered the emotional reactions of athletes following the delivery of undesirable news.

Information from this study supports research indicating that young adolescence can be a very turbulent time (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000; Dworkin & Larson, 2005). Work by Eccles and colleagues (1993), notes that "public forms of evaluation … may have a negative impact on many early adolescents' self-perceptions and motivation" (p. 93). It is similarly reported that those youth facing transitions between schools may have increased difficulty dealing with social comparison (Eccles et al. 1993). This matches data from this research as participants noted that their motivation was decreased when they learned of their elimination in public places. The experience of John, who as a grade nine student at high school, was too intimidated to speak to his coach about the reasons he was eliminated exemplify how transitions between elementary and high school can lead to further challenges for youth of this age.

Research by DuRant and Hergenroeder (1994) found that being cut from a team is a leading reason for attrition from team sports and reports that these athletes are "less likely to indicate that they would participate in organized sports in the future" (p. 458). The findings from this research would suggest that the manner in which one is informed of their non-selection matters when gauging motivation for continued involvement.

Factors such as the provision of feedback, encouragement to pursue alternative choices, and genuine conversations were significant determinants when considering athlete motivation towards future sport participation.

Lastly, it is important to note that research about the critical role of parents during important or difficult experiences facing their children was demonstrated in this research. It was suggested that dealing with elimination from competitive sport would be an occasion when youth, who are spending increasing amounts of time with their peers, but decreasing amounts of times with parents, would in fact turn to their parents for advice and support (Atwater, 1996; Health Canada, 2004; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000). Participants from this research noted that this indeed occurred, as the theme of parent involvement emerged as a significant consideration within the context of non-selection. Findings from this study suggest that parents are not only important figures for providing support to their child facing elimination, but that their relationship with tryout knowledge, sport system awareness, and their potential presence during release interactions mediate the significance their role takes.

To summarize, this research builds upon gaps present in the work of Côté by addressing the fate of athletes who involuntarily withdraw (or rather: are eliminated). Participants from this research illustrated practical examples of coach learning through experiences and reflection. The role of parents was deemed important by many participants who noted that when youth aged 13-15 are excluded from a team, parents are oftentimes called upon for support as mediated by the amount of tryout knowledge with which they are provided.

Not According to Plan

Fortunately most of this research was carried out precisely as it was projected and presented during the proposal stage. It is important however at this point, to illustrate where projections did not align with the actual process. I had originally planned to collect and analyze, in addition to all interview material, any team elimination material submitted by my participants. That is, I anticipated that some participants would have various forms of documentations such as letters informing athletes of their release, or in the case of coaches, I thought that they might have some sort of semi-standardized letter that they employ should they inform their non-selected athletes in that manner. In fact, only two coaches had material available, and while it was related to tryouts neither coach could provide an actual example of a letter they would use to inform someone of their elimination. Rather, the paperwork that I received was supplemental information relevant to all athletes attending a given tryout. It thus seemed irrelevant to consider in the analysis. Furthermore, the amount and depth of the information gathered through the interviews with each participant was considered to be ample when embarking on the analysis.

Another departure from the original plan was that while I had assumed that I would be able to speak with participants from a very broad representation of youth sports, including individual sports; this was not the case. I assumed that there would be circumstances when children would have to tryout for places on training teams for individual sports such as gymnastics, tennis, swimming, or martial arts. After many inquiries I was informed that for sports such as these, children and youth generally earned places on elite training squads based only on objective and actual competition

performance results. Although I did not exhaust every single avenue in order to verify the applicability of this fact to all clubs or organizations, I became comfortable with the reality that finding participants from individual spots who would be able to discuss athlete elimination in a manner congruent with the rest of the participants from team sports was too problematic and perhaps atypical. Thus, although I was able to speak to individuals from a fairly large array of youth team sports, I was not able to speak with anyone from individual youth sports because the participant recruitment leads that I followed resulted in eliminations incongruent with my research questions and objectives. As a result, suggestions for future research in this area became apparent.

Recommendations for Future Related Research

Due to the fact that this research ultimately involved only team sports for youth aged 13-15 there are some obvious places for other researchers to pursue when investigating the process of communicating non-selection. It may be worthwhile to have an understanding about the meanings and repercussions associated with the elimination of children younger than 13; and more specifically those still within their 'sampling years'. Likewise, the communication of tryout results to older and more elite athletes such as those vying for places on National or International Teams would be of particular interest to those with vested interests in noting the consequences and future directions of Canada's top eliminated athletes.

In terms of actual subsequent sport participation by eliminated youth and how the communication of previous elimination mediates ensuing choices, this study provided only relevant motivational considerations as presented by the meanings of the

participants. That is to say, should someone wish to have actual participation data and statistics about the relationship between elimination methods and subsequent sport participation, a quantitative study involving a large number of athlete participants would have to be done. Furthermore, in order to quantify the relationship between sport participation or cessation and the manner that non-selection is communicated, investigations would need to be made about other potentially confounding factors such as considerations raised in this study like: competing interests (in and outside of sports), the values of friends and family and so on.

Should more coaches be interested in addressing the concerns of athletes and parents as presented here, there is perhaps the need for more information about how reportedly successful coaches in this area achieve this. That is, are there 'best practices', specific actions, and behaviours that ought to be researched and the results circulated amongst coaching communities in order to help coaches take the considerations of athletes and parents, together with their own, into something conceivable and feasible? Each coach, although very willing to discuss their experiences with tryout communication with me, were extremely interested in becoming aware of "the results" of my research. Coaches wanted to know if what they were doing was 'the right way'. While I tried to explain that the purpose of my research was not to determine the most correct and most incorrect methods to communicate tryout results, but rather to present the meanings and thus issues and considerations presented by those involved, many still hoped for something more concrete to help guide them. I will present considerations in the form of questions that have the potential to help guide coaches make decisions, but I would maintain that more research highlighting the effectiveness of certain strategies

when communicating tryout results is warranted. Further research with input from various stakeholders will likely bring about deeper understandings about successful and desirable elimination experiences.

Recommendations for Those in Youth Sport

After reviewing the previous chapter it might appear that the findings of this research lead not to specific answers but rather illuminate the complexity surrounding the communication of non-selection. At this time I will present questions that may act to highlight the many issues discussed by the participants. How each question is answered is up to the individual, and how much weight they place on the importance of the question is also personal. The questions serve only to help raise awareness of what these participants think *ought to be considered* when navigating through the communication of tryout results. These questions are intended to raise the issues that emerged in this study and contribute to informed choices concerning practices employed when communicating tryout results.

Questions for <u>Coaches</u> to consider when making elimination announcements:

- To what extent does the way that I plan to inform athletes of their elimination:
  - Answer their questions of 'why didn't I make the team'?
    - In a way that is personal and relevant?
    - In a way that is sensitive of their age?
    - In a way that considers their investment and future goals in this sport?

- Let me inform them of their strengths?
- Provide me with the opportunity to discuss with them the alternative programs, leagues, or lessons in our sport?
- Invite them to ask future questions about their evaluation and follow-up questions about the feedback I provided?
- Consider the environment (surroundings, other people) in which they will react to being eliminated?
- Encourage or discourage confrontations with youth or their parents?
- Match with the amount of time I can, or am willing to spend?

➢ To what degree do I care about the subsequent physical activity of non-selected athletes and is maintaining their motivation in this sport or potential other activities important to me?

➢ How well am I informed about other programs, leagues, clubs, or lessons in my sport offered within my community?

➢ How best can I provide information about alternative sport choices to non-selected athletes?

➢ Do the provided reasons as to why they are unsuccessful in making the team:
  - Include mostly areas that are controlled by the youth?

- Include information about how to improve in those areas needing improvement?
- Significantly overshadow any positive feedback I can offer about the areas in which they have strengths?

➢ Are the eliminated youth already expecting some of the feedback that I will provide:

- Because I indicated that I would provide feedback following the tryout?
- Because feedback and coaching has been offered throughout the tryout process?

➢ How do I feel about the ways in which I have experienced, or observed others being eliminated when I participated in youth sport?

➢ What can I learn from the examples of other coaches regarding the manner that tryout decisions are announced?

➢ Should I consider using a combination of communication methods? (For example: lists with follow-up meetings, lists with letters, letters with follow-up phone calls etc.)

- Are certain methods a better fit during various stages of the tryout process?

➢ What can I do to clarify how tryout results will be communicated?

- Can I offer choices to the athletes that would allow them to receive news of their elimination in a manner that is personally desirable?

- What is the role of parents and would it be beneficial to increase their role?
    - Should I/how can I inform parents of the tryout process?
    - Should I/how can I inform parents of their child's elimination?
    - Will the child require support and parenting to deal with their elimination and what is my role in helping the parents?

- How can I solicit feedback about the way in which I inform athletes of their non-selection?

- How do I want the youth to feel when he/she leaves here as an eliminated athlete? What have I done to help make this happen?

Questions for <u>Athletes</u> facing elimination:

- How can I ask for (more) feedback?

- How can I respect the coach's time whilst still gaining answers to my questions?

- How can I demonstrate respect for the coach and the coaching decision?

- How can I deal with my pain and disappointment and still learn from the situation?

- What are my other options in this sport and how can I learn more about them?

- How do I want my parents to be involved and what is my role in helping them to become involved?

Questions for Parents of Athletes facing (or potentially facing) elimination:

- What should I know about the sport system before my child attends the tryouts?

- What can I do to remain informed about the tryout process?

- What are the options facing my child should he or she be eliminated?

- What can I do to become informed about the alternative choices within their desired sport?

- How can I help my child appreciate the varying levels of competitiveness within their sport?

- What can I do to support and demonstrate my support for the coach's decision?

- How can I reinforce the positive feedback that was provided to my child?

- How can I provide feedback to the coach and/or to the organization about the way in which non-selection was communicated?

- How can I respect the coach's time and effort whilst still gaining answers to my questions?

Questions for Club Administrators of youth sport:

- Whose responsibility is it to ensure that families understand the club, community, Provincial, or National developmental systems of the sport? How does this occur?

- Whose responsibility is it to ensure that families receive information about alternative options (other playing levels) in the sport? How does this occur?

- In sports were consecutive eliminations (trickle down cuts) occur in order to form teams at the highest levels first, whose responsibility is it to ensure that the process works properly and how is this achieved?

- To what degree does our team/club/organization have policies, recommendations, best practices or resources about communicating tryout results that are available to coaches?

- How can we solicit feedback about the way in which our coaches inform athletes of their non-selection?

Conclusion

In closing I must thank the participants who were so willing to share their personal and poignant experiences of youth elimination from sport. Their contributions are deeply valued for I believe they are the first accounts about the meanings and considerations surrounding the communication of non-selection. I have attempted to make this research accessible and relevant to the actual practitioners, as I desire to initiate informed action in the field. May my efforts here contribute towards greater understandings and more informed choices surrounding the communication of non-selection in youth sports.

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Interviews: Main Areas of Investigation and Sample Questions
(final version of an evolving list)

Coaches

- What team elimination communication methods are they familiar with?
  - Can you please tell me all the different ways that coaches can let athletes know the results of their tryout?
  - What are the ways of communication tryout results to athletes?

- What is their experience with team elimination as a coach?
  - How many times have you run tryouts and had to make cuts?
  - How long for kids aged 13-15?

- Which communication methods do they use and for what reasons?
  - How have you informed athletes of tryout results?
  - How did you decide which communication method to use?
  - Why did you use those different ways?
  - Why did you switch methods?
  - Which methods have you used for the 13-15 age group?
  - What are the practical/logistical factors in making your decision?

- What meanings are made about given team elimination communication methods?
  - How do you feel about the current method that you use?
  - Why do you like it?
  - What does it mean to you to have to make cuts? How does the way in which you inform the cut athletes influence the entire situation for you?
  - What do you mean to happen to athletes when you inform athletes that they have been eliminated? IE what do you *intend* them to perceive?

- What are the perceived and actual outcomes of a given team elimination communication method?
  - What happens (to you, to the cut athletes) after you let the athletes know the tryout results?
  - How is the method you use now working for you? What makes you think that?
  - How have athletes reacted to the methods you've chosen?
  - Can you tell me about any feedback you have ever received about how you have run tryouts – specifically about how you have informed athletes about team selection decisions?
  - Have you ever heard from players or parents wanting more information? Can you tell me about an instance of this?

- What method would they prefer and why?
  - Which method do you like best and why?
  - Which method do you think the athletes would like best and why?
  - Which method do you think the parents of the kids would like best and why?
  - Why (if any) are there differences in your answers? Are different groups looking for different things out of this experience? What and why?

Interviews: Main Areas of Investigation and Sample Questions
(final version of an evolving list)

Athletes

- What team elimination communication methods are they familiar with?
  - Can you please tell me all the different ways that coaches can let athletes know the results of their tryout?
  - What are the ways of communication tryout results to athletes?

- What is their experience with team elimination as an athlete?
  - How many tryouts have you been involved with?
  - When you were cut (aged 13-15), how did the coach let you know?
  - Were there other times when either you made the team or where cut – if so please tell me about all the competitive sport setting you've been involved with.

- What meanings are made about given team elimination communication methods?
  - Can you tell me about how if felt to be informed of the tryout result in that manner?
  - What are your thoughts and feelings about how the coach decided to let you know?
  - What did (does) it mean(t) to have been told in that way?
  - (feedback/closure issues)

- What are the perceived and actual outcomes of a given team elimination communication method?
  - Tell me about what you did after that experience (13-15)
  - What happened after this?
  - What do you think was the effect of this tryout – specifically about how the coach let you know of the tryout results?
  - Can you tell me about your sporting interests and pursuits after this experience?

- What method would they prefer and why?
  - Do you think the coach made the right choice in picking that method to communicate to you that you hadn't made the team? How would you have done it differently?
  - If you were a coach how do you think you would like to communicate your tryout results to the athletes?
  - Which methods do you think most coaches prefer and why?
  - How do you think parents of kids getting cut would think about this? What method do you think they prefer?
  - Why (if any) are there differences in your answers? Are different groups looking for different things out of this experience? What and why?

- Perceptions of others
  - Why do you think (your) coaches chose the method they did?
  - What are the practical/logistical factors in his/her decision?

Interviews: Main Areas of Investigation and Sample Questions
(final version of an evolving list)

Parents

- What team elimination communication methods are they familiar with?
  - Can you please tell me all the different ways that coaches can let athletes know the results of their tryout?
  - What are the ways of communication tryout results to athletes?

- What is their experience with team elimination as a parent?
  - How many times has each of your children been through a tryout procedure?
  - How many when aged 13-15?

- What meanings are made about given team elimination communication methods?
  - How did you feel about how the coach let your child know that he/she hadn't made the team?
  - What did you make of the experience?
  - What are your thoughts and feelings about how the coach decided to let him/her know?
  - What did being told in a certain way mean to your child?
  - What did it mean to you?

- What are the perceived and actual outcomes of a given team elimination communication method in their family?
  - What happened after this?
  - What happened in your family after your child didn't make that team? How did the manner in which he or she was informed of the result impact the situation
  - Did anything change in your family afterwards?
  - Can you tell me about your child's sporting interests and pursuits after this experience?

- What method would they prefer and why?
  - Do you think the coach made the right choice in picking that method to communicate to your child that he/she hadn't made the team? How would you have had it differently?
  - If you were a coach how do you think you would like to communicate your tryout results to the athletes?
  - Which methods do you think most coaches prefer and why?
  - Which method do you think the athletes would like best and why?
  - Why (if any) are there differences in your answers? Are different groups looking for different things out of this experience? What and why?

- Perceptions of others
  - Why do you think coaches chose the method they do?
  - What are the practical/logistical factors in his/her decision?

Conceptual Baggage

Kirby and McKenna (1989) note that investigating and recording one's conceptual baggage is not only a way to initially hone in on a topic, but is also "a process by which you can state your personal assumptions about the topic and the research process" (p. 32). It would then seem important to address several questions.

Questions asked before research was conducted

Why am I interested in this topic? I am interested in youth sport and in the coaching of such. I am particularly interested in coaching education, and that may be due to the fact that I have been, so far, somewhat disappointed in my experiences therein. I think that there are holes and gaps in knowledge in the current National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP), and I think that this could potentially have an effect on the quality of coaching. It is important to me that children and youth receive quality experiences in sport, and I do think that coach education programs (such as the NCCP) play a role in this. I am particularly interested in the latter part of the team selection process. That is, the process of cutting is appealing to me because I find it to be so important, yet so overlooked. As so far as I can tell there are multitudes of studies investigating the impact of sport on youth participants, but I want to know about those that do not make the team. I think that if coaches propose to be interested in youth; interested in providing positive sporting experiences for youth, then to me, they should also be interested in those of whom they do not select for their team. To me, coaches should be interested in the best interests of all youth, not just the interests and needs of those children selected for their team.

Why do I want to do this research? I want to do this research because I think that one of the gaps in the coaching education process is about cutting and cutting procedures. I want to know about different ways coaches perform team elimination, and about what meanings those procedures have on those being eliminated. I want to know how different meanings of being cut transpire into future action (what happens to those who are cut)? I do want to have an impact on the coaching education literature, because I think some insight into the cutting process is an important contribution to what is currently available. I want coaches to become aware of what meanings are derived from the cutting process and would like them in turn, to perhaps make considerations to this when proceeding with team eliminations in their future.

What assumptions about this area do I have? There are many things that I have assumed to be in place in order to do this research. I make the assumption that there are in fact several ways of doing team eliminations and that different coaches employ these different methods. I assume that team eliminations mean different things to different people and that some of those meanings will be shared with others, but some will be entirely different. By this I imply that cutting will mean different things to the coach, to those who are cut, and to the youths' parents, but that also different youths may attribute different meanings to the same method of cutting. I make the assumption that coaches who perform cuts regularly, people who were cut as youth, and parents of youth who were cut are interested and available to talk to me about this, and I assume to a certain extent that their narratives will be truthful (their version of truth – but not falsehoods). I assume that there may be trends in the meanings I find; that is, maybe more or less people find certain methods of cutting to mean more or less similar things. There will be people

who find completely different meanings (about the same phenomenon or cutting method), but I make the assumption that at the end of the day, there might be some preferences towards certain cutting methods over others.

How do my assumptions and reasons for wanting to pursue this area affect my research? I think that a keen interest in the research area is important to provide motivation. Thus, the personal interest I have for this area will drive my motivation towards doing and completing the research project. Whilst I do not have assumptions about any certain methods of cutting that might be 'better' or 'worse' than others, the fact that I have presumptions about trends in preferences could lend itself towards 'looking' for certain meanings over others. I must be careful and conscious about investigating all meanings, and all interpretations about cutting, and can ensure that I am interpreting other's meanings as they would, by checking my analyses with my participants. I need to be aware that some (or all) of my assumptions might be challenged, and to be open and aware to alternative perspectives. I need to be constantly aware of my conceptual baggage, for it is a never-ending introspection.

Questions asked during research process

What are the outcomes of my previous assumptions? My assumption that coaches employ a variety of communication methods to inform youth of their non-selection was correct. This came as a relief, for had I found that most coaches used the same, or very similar methods, I don't think that I would be gathering responses from participants that demonstrate the amount of depth or richness as I am now since the participants are speaking about a significant number of communication methods. Thus, so far, the

experiences shared by the participants demonstrate a wide array of meanings, understandings and considerations, and I don't think this would have occurred to this degree had it been found that a very small number of communication methods are employed.

I believe that the participants are telling the truth – that is, *their* truth. I think that I am a doing a good job a convincing the participants that there are no right or better answers and that it is their unique experiences that interest me. I don't think that any participants are altering or embellishing their replies in order to be perceived in a certain way; rather I think they know that I value their honesty. As a result, I really do think that the participants are being quite honest and open about their experiences surrounding non-selection in youth sport.

As for trends in the research, at this point it is too early to establish the major and sub-themes although I am able to shape and re-shape the types of questions I am asking based on previous interviews. That is, there are certain issues, and meanings surrounding certain themes that have started to re-occur, and as a result I am able to more thoroughly investigate these themes by asking about them in subsequent interviews. As for 'preferences' towards certain methods over others, I am not sure if participants actually have favourites. What is becoming clear, is that through the process of talking about their experiences some participants are realizing the complexity involved with communicating non-selection, and many of those who are not currently coaches remain uncertain about how they would approach the situation should they be a coach. That is, the athlete and parent participants, seem not to have a preferred method and note that they would need to think a great deal about it before employing any one method. Whether or

not, they had preferences before our interviews is unknown to me – for I didn't ask about this. I don't think it's relevant.

How are my assumptions about certain methods affecting the way in which I conduct the research? I think this is a really important question, and I have kept it in mind during every interview. Even though I had previous opinions about communication methods (the ones I was aware of), I have been surprised by my ability to change my mind. In speaking with various participants I have been privileged to learn about different and sometimes opposing points of view, and this has allowed me to consider the methods of communication with a much wider perspective. So whilst I still have some enduring opinions about certain methods, I feel that I have been able to keep an open mind about each and every method discussed and that this is reflected in the ways that the research is being conducted. Thus, I am deliberate in not endorsing certain methods over others in the phrasing and asking of the questions, yet I encourage the participants to tell me their complete thoughts about the issue, considering both pros and cons.

How are my assumptions about certain methods affecting the way in which I write this research project? Similar to the ways in which my assumptions were involved with the actual interviewing of the participants, so too were they important to consider when interpreting the information and writing this thesis. IPA analysis is detailed in Chapter 3, and I was consistent in adhering to those recommendations. That is, themes and sub-themes were interpreted as a result of the richness of the information across and within

transcripts. To avoid redundancy, I would refer to that chapter where I have detailed the interpretive process of analysis.

In terms of the actual writing of the research I wanted to be careful not to highlight certain meanings or considerations more than what was deemed appropriate by the actual data and conversations with the participants. Related to this, was member checking and I am proud to say that my interpretations of my participants' replies were entirely accepted by every participant. Each participant had several weeks to review their contributions and my interpretations of their responses, and all were satisfied with the analysis and writing, and most are eager to view the complete (yet condensed) report.

In order to determine an order to present the findings I was deliberate in choosing a way to write the findings such that further interpretations are encouraged by each reader. That is, the nature of this work is not to interpret my participants' experiences in order to offer 'answers', but rather to offer a deepened illustration of the process and how and why certain meanings are held by different stakeholders in the process. With this in mind, it was extremely important to decide how the findings would be presented, for the presentation of information certainly influences readers to appreciate what is thought to be important from the writers' perspective. In order to allow readers to have their own opportunity to consider the findings, I presented the information in such a way that the individual communication methods were hardly ever compared or contrasted, but rather the issues surrounding them were methodically discussed. I feel that this presentation allows readers to consider for themselves where the meanings and considerations fit within the specific communication methods, and if relevant, can make personal choices about which method to employ when communicating non-selection to youth.

The considerations offered in the form of questions in Chapter 5 offer a thorough overview of all the meanings and feelings discussed by the participants. I attempted to ensure that the themes and sub-themes were reflected within these questions, but allowed for less-discussed meanings to be present as well. The questions are purposefully not conducive for outright 'yes' or 'no' answers. In writing them to be more open-ended I hope that they can stimulate thinking and discussion so that readers can be reflective about their values and opinions regarding the considerations surrounding the communication of non-selection.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Informing Youth of Their Non-Selection in Competitive Sport

Dear Sport Coach:

My name is Lauren, and I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. I have coached for several years and am interested in the team selection process. I am especially interested in how team selection decisions are communicated to young athletes who are not chosen for membership within a competitive sport program. **The purpose of the study is to learn about the methods of communication that are used by coaches to inform youth when they have been eliminated (often referred to as being 'cut') from a team after tryouts.**

In order to learn more about this, I am hoping to speak to three different groups of people. Specifically, I would like to speak to people who were eliminated from a sport program when they were 12-15 year-old athletes. I would also like to speak to parents of a child who was eliminated from a sport program when she/he was 12-15 years old. Lastly, I would like to speak with coaches who run tryouts regularly, and have made team eliminations for youth aged 12-15 on at least five occasions.

You have received this letter because your name came to my attention through a mutual contact as a coach who might be suitable and interested in being involved in this study. I would be very grateful should you decide to contribute to this study by offering a coach's perspective. It's important to understand however, that your participation is strictly voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study, and there are no negative consequences for choosing not to do so.

Procedure:

Interviews: In order to learn about your experience as a coach, I will be performing interviews. The interviews will take place in a quiet and convenient place (perhaps at your home, in a peaceful public meeting place, or at the University) depending upon your preference. Due to the distance between some participants and myself, some interviews may have to be done over the phone. The interviews will last about an hour and a half, and we will discuss your thoughts and feelings about team elimination (cutting) procedures, and what the experience means to you. You will be interviewed individually, and there will likely be follow-up contact in order to check my understanding of the information that you provide.

Team Elimination Material: Another way that I can learn about the different ways that coaches can inform athletes of team selection decisions is by looking at team elimination material. That is, any kind of relevant letters or documents that coaches distribute to players during or following tryouts would be useful to this research. If you agree to participate, and have these kind of documents that you wouldn't mind sharing – please bring them to the interview with any identifying characteristics (personal or team names) removed or blacked out.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Since the interviews will be audio-recorded, and interview notes will be taken, it is important to keep these records safe and confidential. Instead of using your name, you will be assigned a pseudonym, and you will not be personally identified in the findings and write-ups of this research. The voice recordings from the interviews will be typed, and will be protected on a personal computer under password. Any printed copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet within a locked office, to which only my supervisor and myself will have access. Any personal team elimination documents that are submitted will have names removed, and will also be stored in a locked cabinet. The information will be kept for five years after a publication is done (a write-up of the research), and after this time it will be destroyed.

Benefits: The potential benefit arising from your participation in this study is that you may come to a better understanding of the tryout process – specifically the methods of communication used to inform athletes when they have *not* been selected. The information that I collect may also provide guidance to other coaches and sport administrators about the different ways of cutting youth. Information from this study might help coaches understand the impact of various methods that athletes can be informed on their non-selection and ensure that future team selection processes (cutting) can be as caring as possible.

Risks: There are no major risks associated with this study. Given that the method of collecting information will be by interviewing and reviewing personal team elimination documents, there may be some risk associated with the disclosure of personal and/ or sensitive information. This may make some participants feel uncomfortable. To reduce this risk, after I type up your interview, I will review it with you. If you find any information you do not wish to be there, I will remove it.

Freedom to Withdraw: You may choose not to participate at any time during this study. You may withdraw during an interview, or after an interview by informing either of the researchers of your desire to withdraw. Upon your request, up until the information is included in a publication, your information will be removed from the study.

Should you wish to discuss this study further, please don't hesitate to contact either myself (lauren.capstick@ualberta.ca), or my program supervisor, Dr. Brian Nielsen (brian.nielsen@ualberta.ca or 780 492-3839). You can also contact Dr. Brian Maraj, who is the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee for the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta (brian.maraj@ualberta.ca or 780 492-5910). Dr. Maraj has no direct involvement with the study.

Thank you

Lauren Capstick (Principle Investigator) A. Brian Nielsen (Graduate Supervisor)

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Informing Youth of Their Non-Selection in Competitive Sport

Dear Former Youth Athlete:

My name is Lauren, and I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. I have coached for several years and am interested in the team selection process. I am especially interested in how team selection decisions are communicated to young athletes who are not chosen for membership within a competitive sport program. **The purpose of the study is to learn about the methods of communication that are used by coaches to inform youth when they have been eliminated (often referred to as being 'cut') from a team after tryouts.**

In order to learn more about this, I am hoping to speak to three different groups of people. Specifically, I would like to speak to people who were eliminated from a sport program when they were 12-15 year-old athletes. I would also like to speak to parents of a child who was eliminated from a sport program when she/he was 12-15 years old. Lastly, I would like to speak with coaches who run tryouts regularly, and have made team eliminations for youth aged 12-15 on at least five occasions.

You have received this letter because your name came to my attention through a mutual contact as a former youth athlete who might be suitable and interested in being involved in this study. I would be very grateful should you decide to contribute to this study by offering an athlete's perspective. It's important to understand however, that your participation is strictly voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study, and there are no negative consequences for choosing not to do so.

Procedure:

Interviews: In order to learn about your experience as a former youth athlete I will be performing interviews. The interviews will take place in a quiet and convenient place (perhaps at your home, in a peaceful public meeting place, or at the University) depending upon your preference. Due to the distance between some participants and myself, some interviews may have to be done over the phone. The interviews will last about an hour and a half, and we will discuss your thoughts and feelings about team elimination (cutting) procedures, and what the experience meant or still means to you. You will be interviewed individually, and there will likely be follow-up contact in order to check my understanding of the information that you provide.

Team Elimination Material: Another way that I can learn about the different ways that coaches can inform athletes of team selection decisions is by looking at team elimination material. That is, any kind of relevant letters or documents that coaches distribute to players during or following tryouts would be useful to this research. If you agree to participate, and have these kind of documents that you wouldn't mind sharing – please bring them to the interview with any identifying characteristics (personal or team names) removed or blacked out.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Since the interviews will be audio-recorded, and interview notes will be taken, it is important to keep these records safe and confidential. Instead of using your name, you will be assigned a pseudonym, and you will not be personally identified in the findings and write-ups of this research. The voice recordings from the interviews will be typed, and will be protected on a personal computer under password. Any printed copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet within a locked office, to which only my supervisor and myself will have access. Any personal team elimination documents that are submitted will have names removed, and will also be stored in a locked cabinet. The information will be kept for five years after a publication is done (a write-up of the research); and after this time it will be destroyed.

Benefits: The potential benefit arising from your participation in this study is that you may come to a better understanding of the tryout process – specifically the methods of communication used to inform athletes when they have *not* been selected. The information that I collect may also provide guidance to coaches and sport administrators about the different ways of cutting youth. Information from this study might help coaches understand the impact of various methods that athletes can be informed on their non-selection and ensure that future team selection processes (cutting) can be as caring as possible.

Risks: There are no major risks associated with this study. Given that the method of collecting information will be by interviewing and reviewing personal team elimination documents, there may be some risk associated with the disclosure of personal and/ or sensitive information. This may make some participants feel uncomfortable. To reduce this risk, after I type up your interview, I will review it with you. If you find any information you do not wish to be there, I will remove it.

Freedom to Withdraw: You may choose not to participate at any time during this study. You may withdraw during an interview, or after an interview by informing either of the researchers of your desire to withdraw. Upon your request, up until the information is included in a publication, your information will be removed from the study.

Should you wish to discuss this study further, please don't hesitate to contact either myself (lauren.capstick@ualberta.ca), or my program supervisor, Dr. Brian Nielsen (brian.nielsen@ualberta.ca or 780 492-3839). You can also contact Dr. Brian Maraj, who is the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee for the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta (brian.maraj@ualberta.ca or 780 492-5910). Dr. Maraj has no direct involvement with the study.

Thank you

Lauren Capstick (Principal Investigator) A. Brian Nielsen (Graduate Supervisor)

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Informing Youth of Their Non-Selection in Competitive Sport

Dear Sport Parent:

My name is Lauren, and I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. I have coached for several years and am interested in the team selection process. I am especially interested in how team selection decisions are communicated to young athletes who are not chosen for membership within a competitive sport program. **The purpose of the study is to learn about the methods of communication that are used by coaches to inform youth when they have been eliminated (often referred to as being 'cut') from a team after tryouts.**

In order to learn more about this, I am hoping to speak to three different groups of people. Specifically, I would like to speak to people who were eliminated from a sport program when they were 12-15 year-old athletes. I would also like to speak to parents of a child who was eliminated from a sport program when she/he was 12-15 years old. Lastly, I would like to speak with coaches who run tryouts regularly, and have made team eliminations for youth aged 12-15 on at least five occasions.

You have received this letter because your name came to my attention through a mutual contact as a parent who might be suitable and interested in being involved in this study. I would be very grateful should you decide to contribute to this study by offering a parent's perspective. It's important to understand however, that your participation is strictly voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study, and there are no negative consequences for choosing not to do so.

Procedure:

Interviews: In order to learn about your experience as a parent I will be performing interviews. The interviews will take place in a quiet and convenient place (perhaps at your home, in a peaceful public meeting place, or at the University) depending upon where you live. Due to the distance between some participants and myself, some interviews may have to be done over the phone. The interviews will last about an hour and a half, and we will discuss your feelings about team elimination (cutting) procedure, and what the experience meant or still means for you. Each participant will be interviewed individually, and there will likely be follow-up contact with each participant in order to review the information that they provide.

Team Elimination Material: Another way that I can learn about the different ways that coaches can inform athletes of team selection decisions is by looking at team elimination material. That is, any kind of relevant letters or documents that coaches distribute to players during or following tryouts would be useful to this research. If you agree to participate, and have these kind of documents that you wouldn't mind sharing – please bring them to the interview with any identifying characteristics (personal or team names) removed or blacked out.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Since the interviews will be audio-recorded, and interview notes will be taken, it is important to keep these records safe and confidential. Instead of using your name, you will be assigned a pseudonym, and you will not be personally identified in the findings and write-ups of this research. The voice recordings from the interviews will be typed, and will be protected on a personal computer under password. Any printed copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet within a locked office, to which only my supervisor and myself will have access. Any personal team elimination documents that are submitted will have names removed, and will also be stored in a locked cabinet. The information will be kept for five years after a publication is done (a write-up of the research), and after this time it will be destroyed.

Benefits: The potential benefit arising from your participation in this study is that you may come to a better understanding of the tryout process – specifically the methods of communication used to inform athletes when they have *not* been selected. The information that I collect may also provide guidance to coaches and sport administrators about the different ways of cutting youth. Information from this study might help coaches understand the impact of various methods that athletes can be informed on their non-selection and ensure that future team selection processes (cutting) can be as caring as possible.

Risks: There are no major risks associated with this study. Given that the method of collecting information will be by interviewing and reviewing personal team elimination documents, there may be some risk associated with the disclosure of personal and/ or sensitive information. This may make some participants feel uncomfortable. To reduce this risk, after I type up your interview, I will review it with you. If you find any information you do not wish to be there, I will remove it.

Freedom to Withdraw: You may choose not to participate at any time during this study. You may withdraw during an interview, or after an interview by informing either of the researchers of your desire to withdraw. Upon your request, up until the information is included in a publication, your information will be removed from the study.

Should you wish to discuss this study further, please don't hesitate to contact either myself (lauren.capstick@ualberta.ca), or my program supervisor, Dr. Brian Nielsen (brian.nielsen@ualberta.ca or 780 492-3839). You can also contact Dr. Brian Maraj, who is the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee for the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta (brian.maraj@ualberta.ca or 780 492-5910). Dr. Maraj has no direct involvement with the study.

Thank you

Lauren Capstick (Principle Investigator) A. Brian Nielsen (Graduate Supervisor)

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Title of Project:	Informing Youth of Their Non-Selection in Competitive Sport
Principal Investigator:	Lauren Capstick, Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta. (780) 492-2679
Graduate Supervisor	Brian Nielsen, Professor –Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation, University of Alberta. (780) 492-3839

Please respond to the following questions:

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study? Yes No

Have you received and read a copy of the attached Information Letter? Yes No

Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this research? Yes No

Have you had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes No

Do you understand that you are free to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence, and that your information will be withdrawn at your request? Yes No

Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you? Do you understand who will have access to your information? Yes No

This study was explained to me by: _____

I would like to receive a summary of the final results of this research Yes No

I agree to take part in this study

_____ _____ _____

Signature of Research Participant Date Signature of Witness

_____ _____

Printed Name Printed Name

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

_____ _____

Signature of Investigator Date